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Collaborative practices in schools: The impact of school -based leadership teams on inclusive education

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COLLABORATIVE PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS: THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL-BASED LEADERSHIP TEAMS ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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Lisa Jo Vernon

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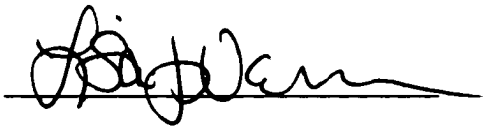

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all my family and friends who have supported me throughout this and my many other endeavors: to my parents, George and Donna Vernon, who always made me finish everything I started; to my nieces, Tori and Abbi, and goddaughter, Anna, for whom I constantly strive to be a positive role model; to the rest of my family for pretending to understand my lack of presence; and to my friends – old and new – who never stopped asking me to "come out and play." You are the ones who kept me sane throughout this chapter of my life.

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You guys are all truly top-notch!

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COLLABORATIVE PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS: THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL-BASED LEADERSHIP TEAMS ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

The Developing School Leadership Teams project was a special education grant funded by Virginia Department of Education to develop personnel training in collaboration with higher education institutions. The purpose of this qualitative study was to observe, describe, and analyze the impact of these teams on inclusive education. Four themes emerged from the data: teacher empowerment, supportive environment (i.e., trust, communication), collaboration, and resources (i.e., knowledge, time).

Through this multiple-case study design, the researcher answered the following overarching question: How did the collaborative practices and processes of school-based leadership teams promote inclusive efforts in schools? Three subquestions provided insight to the main question. (a) To what extent did faculty members believe that their school-based leadership team facilitated change that promoted inclusion of students with disabilities? and (b) How did the leadership team project impact classroom practices? (c) To what extent did the school-based leadership teams increase opportunities for students with disabilities to be served and participate within the general education setting?

The findings indicated that in all three schools increased the number of inclusive classes available to students with disabilities increased. This increase in inclusive practices over a two-year period was significant.

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COLLABORATIVE PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS: THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL-BASED LEADERSHIP TEAMS ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

CHAPTER I – The Problem

According to Reynolds and Birch (1977), "The whole history of education for exceptional children can be told in terms of one steady trend that can be described as progressive inclusion" (cited in Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000, p. 5). Since the enactment of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) in 1975 and later the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), P.L. 101-476 in 1990, students with disabilities have been afforded the following rights: a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (LRE); education with peers without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate; and a continuum of placement options from the least to the most restrictive. In response to this legislation, state and local education agencies across the United States have made concerted efforts to integrate students with disabilities into general education settings.

In the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, most students with disabilities who attended public schools received special education services separately from general education classrooms and their peers, typically in pull-out programs or resource rooms. In general, special education students were placed in general education classrooms essentially for socialization with minimal supports (Morgan, Cruziero, & Whorton, 1997). This process was known as "mainstreaming." The participation of students with disabilities during this phase was commonly restricted to art, music, physical education,

recess, and in some instances, social studies and science (Morgan et al., 1997; Senecal, 2001).

During the past decade, the term for integrating students with disabilities into general education classrooms became known as "inclusion." Inclusion is not a legal term but was coined by advocates and proponents. Inclusion involves placing students with disabilities in general education classrooms where they are accepted and participate fully within that framework. That is, special education services to which students with disabilities are entitled are delivered within that setting. As time passed and proponents of inclusion advocated for more aggressive efforts to integrate students with disabilities, two major pieces of special education legislation were enacted: the IDEA Amendments of 1991 and 1997. The major theme of this new IDEA emphasized inclusion, acceptance, and participation of students with disabilities in the general education curriculum.

Due to the strong advocacy-based component of inclusion, as well as IDEA's vagueness regarding implementation of the LRE, school districts continue to have little research and guidance to help them with their efforts. The limited research that is available focuses on the academic and social impact of inclusion on students with disabilities or perceptions of stakeholders toward inclusive practices. Fewer studies have examined the impact that school personnel (e.g., teachers, principals) have on promoting or hindering inclusive efforts within the school.

Recently, President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB; United States Department of Education [USDOE], 2002). This reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is based on the assertion that all students can learn and achieve success in our nation's schools (USDOE, 2002).

According to Vernon, Baytops, McMahon, Padden, and Walther-Thomas (in press), NCLB stipulates that if students in grades three through eight fail to make adequate yearly progress toward reaching 100% proficiency in reading and math by 2012, the school will face a multitude of accountability measures intended to improve performance of all students – including students with disabilities and other students considered at risk for school failure. The legislative mandates implicitly and explicitly have compelled schools to offer more opportunities for students with disabilities to participate more fully within the general education environment.

Statement of Problem

As the responsibility for educating students with disabilities has been extended beyond special education to becoming a whole-school function, general education teachers and administrators are now being held accountable for educating more diverse populations than ever before. School-based leadership teams comprised of general and special education teachers, support staff, counselors, and administrators will have to collaborate in order to facilitate continuous learning processes and ensure growth among both professionals and students within schools.

Leadership in schools refers to more than just an individual with a title. Collectively, the faculty and staff must take responsibility for improving the whole school if school improvement is to be constant and effective. Barth (1990) shared the belief that all teachers can lead and that their leadership is a major untapped resource for improving our nation's schools. Furthermore, he stated, "When teachers are enlisted and empowered as school leaders, everyone can win" (p. 128). Everyone has the potential and right to work as a leader; accordingly, when leadership is equated with primarily one

person, achievement is limited and excludes the potential participation of the organization's immediate community (Lambert, 1998).

Despite their leadership potential, the task for schools is not simply to offer opportunity and space, but to meet the challenge of organizing human, technical, and social resources into an effective collective endeavor (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). For example, professionals within the school must possess the skills to collaborate in order to support the common purpose of the school. Professional development needed to support collaboration among peers cannot be taken for granted. According to Dumaine (1994), teams are frequently created without training or support, essentially in a vacuum.

People need each other's knowledge to solve complex problems in schools, such as that of improving inclusive opportunities of students with disabilities. Society needs people who can communicate, think, work with others, adapt, and continue to learn. To achieve that goal, educators need to understand, model, and use these skills within the classroom and the entire school. It may be difficult for students to become continuous learners and effective collaborators, if teachers fail to model these behaviors (Fullan, 1993a). Sizer and Sizer (1999) commented, "As individuals, teachers can model. So too can a school, by its collective signals and the tangible priorities, model what is worthy and what is not" (p. 4). Teachers need to be aware of their own abilities when they communicate with others, use critical thinking skills, work with one another, adapt to the environment in which they work, and continue to learn.

The core intentions of a school are not found in a rulebook or even in its mission statement (Sizer & Sizer, 1999). Teachers, as members of school-based leadership teams, need to be aware of perceptions their peers have for the process of school improvement to

succeed. The authors suggested that this foundation can be established better by observing how people in schools spend their time, how they relate to each other, and how they tangle with ideas. "Judge the school not on what it says but on how it 'keeps'" (p. 18).

The student population is changing. With this reformation, general educators are charged with teaching a population representing more varied abilities, skills, and backgrounds. Educational reform efforts, specifically inclusive education, designed to address issues such as these will not be successful unless embraced by stakeholders as important issues in schools. In order to address these complex problems and answer difficult questions surrounding education, teachers and other members of the school community must work together, interdependently. School-based leadership teams via collaboration may be the answer to improving the educational opportunities for all students, specifically those with identified disabilities.

Purpose of Study

The majority of the existing research on successful teams in the workplace has been carried out in business environments. What little research that has been conducted on school leadership teams has mainly focused on team development processes or supports and barriers. Few published studies have examined the impact of leadership teams on whole-school improvement and none was located on topics dealing with leadership teams and the improvement of educational opportunities for students with disabilities. Thus, there is a clear need to identify what makes school teams successful and what impact their work has on special education service delivery, specifically inclusive practices.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to observe, describe, and analyze the development of school-based leadership teams and their impact on classroom practices and teaching techniques; faculty member perceptions of school climate; and the participation of students with disabilities within the general education setting within their respective schools over a two-year period. Through a multiple-case-study approach, the researcher examined three school-based leadership teams as they focused on improving inclusive opportunities for students with mild to moderate disabilities. The major assumption of this study was that by building a network of supports – both within and among the three schools – educational stakeholders, specifically teachers, would be able to (a) analyze and define the needs of their schools; (b) develop action plans to address those needs; and (d) take responsibility for promoting necessary changes in order to meet the diverse needs of all learners. Additionally, it was hypothesized that these supports might assist in improving the school personnel's collective perceptions regarding the educational atmosphere (i.e., school climate).

Research Questions

This study addressed one overarching question: How did the collaborative practices and processes of school-based leadership teams promote inclusive efforts in schools? More specifically, what initiatives prompted by these teams impacted the perceptions of faculty members of their school and of educating students with disabilities?

Additionally, the following three subquestions offered insight to this overarching research question:

1. To what extent did faculty members believe that their school-based leadership team facilitated change that promoted inclusion of students with disabilities?
2. How did the leadership team project impact classroom practices?
3. To what extent did the school-based leadership teams increase opportunities for students with disabilities to be served and participate within the general education setting?

Context of the Study

The Developing School Leadership Teams (DSLT) project was designed to facilitate collaboration between schools and institutions of higher education leading to improved educational opportunities for students with disabilities by increasing the knowledge, skills, abilities, and performance of school personnel who work with them. The project was proposed to the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), Office of Special Education Services, by the School of Education at the College of William and Mary. The DSLT was the result of a partnership between the College of William and Mary and three eligible Virginia school districts.

Eligibility for this grant was threefold. First, the schools must be located in districts with few resources, and that typically did not have opportunities to form connections with colleges or universities. Second, eligible schools must have shown deficiency (less than 70 percent pass rate) in at least one of the four core areas (i.e., English, mathematics, history, science) on state standardized tests. Third, the school district or individual schools must have expressed concern, verbally or in writing, to the School of Education at the College of William and Mary or the VDOE, regarding the

academic performance of students with disabilities, specifically those participating in inclusive settings and participating in statewide achievement tests. (Individual school profiles are available in Appendix A.)

Based on meeting these requirements, three school districts were selected for participation in the project. The districts were encouraged to choose sites – upper-elementary or middle school – where the academic performance of students with disabilities was of greatest concern. The DSLT core staff subsequently conducted on-site visits at the nominated schools, collected baseline data, and presented a brief overview of the project to the interested principals and faculty members. Potential participation benefits and required commitments were discussed and applications for membership to DSLT (see Appendix B) were distributed. The principals, in collaboration with the DSLT core staff, selected approximately 10 team members from a pool of volunteers on the basis of: (a) effective special education or general education teaching, (b) experience teaching students with disabilities in general education settings, (c) demonstrated school leadership, (d) effectiveness in collaborating with others, and (e) interest in participating.

The three school-based leadership teams worked closely with two professors (co-principal investigators) and the researcher (grant coordinator) in developing and implementing site-specific plans that facilitated professional development and increased the academic success of students with disabilities. In addition to emphasizing skill development, the DSLT action plans concentrated on various social processes such as building teacher trust and improving faculty perceptions of their school's climate. Ongoing support and coaching was available for principals to support their teams' leadership efforts.

Based on the collected baseline data, the College staff assisted the three participating school districts in designing professional development models that emphasized research-based teaching and leadership practices, principal coaching and support, and inclusive education (including collaboration, consultation, planning for inclusive practices, academic accommodations, and behavior management). In order to maximize the success of these efforts, the three teams worked closely with district personnel and the College DSLT staff over a span of two years to develop skills, modify existing practices, and expand existing networks of support.

In addition to team meetings in their home schools, the teams met periodically throughout the two years of the study and during the summer. These meetings, facilitated by the College staff, focused on areas of interest or topics relevant to all three settings. The meetings at the beginning of the project centered on teambuilding skills, data-supported action plans, and the general characteristics of students with disabilities. Other topics included active learning strategies, principles for principals, participatory decision-making, building indicators of success, and performance stories. During these various meetings and workshops, the teachers and principals had the opportunity to share their successes and challenges. Additionally, they were provided the chance to problem solve with team members at the other schools who were teaching the same grade level or subject area.

It was the premise of the grant that professional growth opportunities provided through DSLT would enable the school-based leadership team members and colleagues to expand their knowledge and skills related to a range of topics, including needs assessment, teambuilding, collaboration with colleagues and families, leadership

development, the change process, and instructional strategies. Project activities were scheduled in consultation with building and district administrators to ensure that normal instructional time was not lost or disrupted.

This qualitative study contains a narrative of the events and activities from the onset to the end of the project for the three schools. This account incorporates archival data from the researcher's experiences as the grant coordinator, including regular observations of participants and non-participants in their classroom and school settings, during DSLT activities such as summer institutes, in-house meetings, all-team dinner meetings, inservices, and workshops; documentation of their work; and examination of notes, memos, and team members' personal recollections related to the project.

Significance of the Study

This research study was significant in several ways. Specifically, it investigated the effectiveness of school-based leadership teams designed to increase inclusive practices in three separate schools while also assessing the extent to which faculty members who were not participating in the DSLT project believed that their leadership team facilitated changes, improved the working atmosphere, and promoted more inclusive environments and better educational opportunities for students with disabilities in their school. During the study, data gathered for the grant project (i.e., archival documents, social processes results, team self-evaluations, classroom observation reports) as well as additional data gathered via interviews and focus groups identified the overall practices of these school-based leadership teams in their pursuit of a more inclusive, collaborative educational environment. Specifically, the teams identified the

opportunities and challenges they experienced whereas the non-team faculties offered perceptions of the effectiveness of the leadership teams.

The literature is consistent about the impact successful teams have on an organization (e.g., Campion, Papper, & Medsker, 1996; Fullan, 1993b; Katzenbach, 1998; Senge, 1990; Wellins, Byham, & Dixon, 1994). The information obtained through this research project may be helpful to educators directly involved in the school improvement process. Education professionals may compare their teams to those demonstrated in this study. The research provides team members and school leaders with possible alternative means for getting others to accept important school reform initiatives, to become involved and feel empowered, and to identify the strategies that support and barriers that hinder the school improvement process.

The common challenges of teamwork as well as strategies to overcome them may help future teams prepare for, contend with, and avoid hindrances in their teaming process. This study provides principals with information to guide them in their quest to educate more diverse populations, specifically students with disabilities, in the general education environment. Lastly, the findings and conclusions from this study identify the need for future research on how to effectively identify and assess successful teams, inclusive reform efforts, and shared leadership.

Operational Definition of Terms

Several specialized terms are utilized in this study related to school-based leadership and inclusive education. Operational definitions of these terms are provided below.

Collaboration – As described by Friend and Cook (2000), collaboration is "working together in a supportive and mutually beneficial relationship" (p. 5). It is based on shared goals, involves joint resources and responsibility, and requires shared decision-making and accountability. Additionally, collaboration calls for parity and is voluntary.

Inclusive education – For the purpose of this study, inclusive education refers to the placement of students with disabilities in classrooms with their peers without disabilities, to the maximum degree appropriate. Special education supports and services are provided within general education setting (Friend & Cook, 2000; Morgan et al., 1997).

Leadership capacity – Leadership capacity is defined by Lambert (1998) as the skills of leadership that allow adults to capture the imagination of their colleagues and enable them to negotiate real changes in their own schools, and to tackle the inevitable conflicts that arise from such courageous undertakings.

Mild to moderate disabilities – For the purpose of this study, mild to moderate disabilities refers to students with learning disabilities, emotional disorders, or other identified disabilities who are capable socially, cognitively, and emotionally of being successful within the general education setting with appropriate classroom accommodations or modifications.

School-based leadership teams – School-based leadership teams, in this study, refers to administrators, teachers, specialists, and guidance counselors acting as leaders within a school who come together to pursue a shared goal surrounding the improvement of student learning. The overarching rationale of these teams is to engage collaboratively

to achieve the stated purpose and to take collective responsibility for work they could not achieve alone (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Lambert, 1998).

School climate - According to Hoy, Tarter, and Kottkamp (1991), school climate is defined as "the relatively enduring quality of the school environment that is experienced by participants, affects their behavior, and is based on their collective perception of behavior in schools" (p. 10).

School profile – The school profile contains information pertaining to student, community, and instructional characteristics of the school to help understand the students, the demographic context of the school, and the structure of the school's instructional program.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations are constraints imposed on the meaning, generality, application of the research findings, or weaknesses in the study, which may emerge (Creswell, 1998). This study was conducted with the awareness of the following limitations:

1. Because findings of qualitative research are not typically generalizable to a larger population, one cannot assume that the findings from this research are transferable to larger populations.
2. Due to her direct involvement in the grant project, the researcher, as the primary data collector and analyst, may unwittingly have reflected her own values and biases, despite every effort to remain objective.
3. Data informing this study were based to some degree on the participants' and team members' recollections of past events, which may have been distorted by the passage of time.

4. The study included a relatively small sample of school-based teams based on characteristics previously outlined by the project grant.

Delimitations are defined as limitations the researcher has imposed on the study that limit generalization, or how the study is narrowed in scope (Creswell, 1998). This study had several delimitations. The study was limited by eligibility requirements listed in the grant, which included the schools' performances on state standardized tests, location in rural school districts, and the schools' expressed concern about the academic performance of students with disabilities. The study was narrowed further to schools (a) located within southeastern Virginia and (b) with student populations at the upper-elementary and middle levels.

Chapter II – Review of the Literature

Many schools are failing to meet the needs of students, but some schools are thriving. "There are schools in the poorest of neighborhoods with long histories of failure that are now succeeding ... without significant increases in funding" (Brookover, Erickson, & McEvoy, 1997, p. 2). In addition to setting high academic expectations for students, successful schools continually make every effort to improve instructional effectiveness. The literature on effective schools highlights clear norms and value systems of achievement with faculty, staff, and school leaders who are committed to them (Bell, 2001; Brookover et al., 1997; Darling-Hammond, 1997). The successes of these schools, which seemingly have the odds stacked against them, suggest that all schools have the potential for improvement and meeting the needs of all their students.

Successful schools are marked with effective leadership. Thus, leadership, at both district and school levels, was noted as the essential difference between effective schools and those that are considered ineffectual (Bell, 2001). Effective schools accept no excuses for poor academic performance and "respect, high expectations, support, hard work, and empowerment [are] key words that [apply] to both faculty and students" (Bell, 2001, p. 10).

In order for more schools to become effective, educational professionals must learn from past failures in school reform efforts. The following variables were listed by Brookover and colleagues (1997) as issues consistently linked to school failure.

- Widely shared belief among school staff that the socioeconomic status of students alone will determine their achievement levels.
- The practice of identifying a significant proportion of the student body as slow learners.
- Failure to recognize and reward teachers and students who, despite considerable difficulties, still produce high levels of achievement.
- Failure to retrain, redirect, or otherwise alter the behavior of teachers who are widely recognized to be ineffective.
- The lack of a staff development program relevant to effective curriculum planning and instruction.
- The relative lack of time teachers spend in uninterrupted instruction which involves students in learning tasks directed to appropriate learning goals. (p. 4)

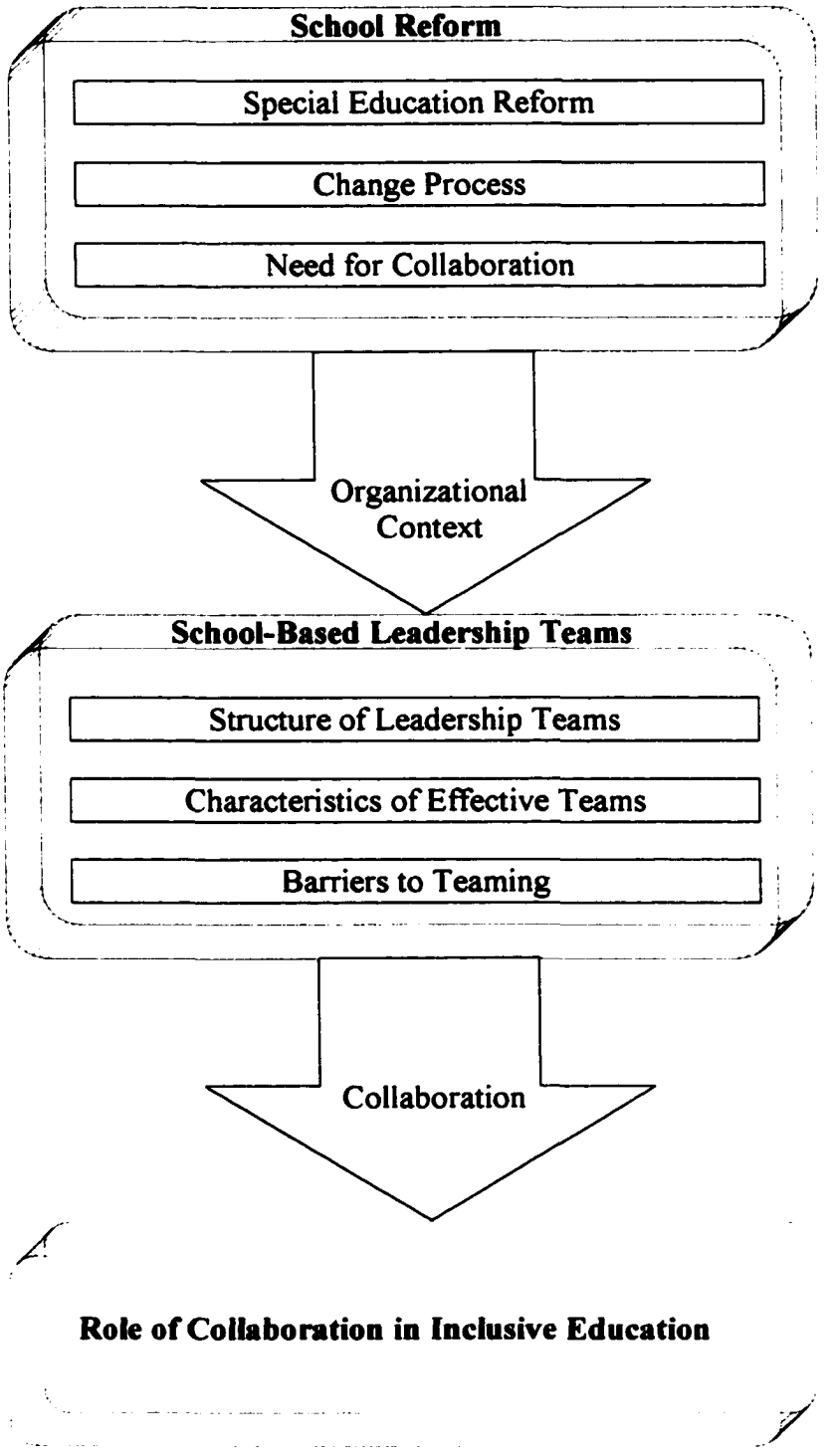
Rosenholtz (1989) concluded that effective schools are places where the larger questions about educational practices are constantly at the forefront of school dialogue and staff meetings. Successful schools are places that are always in the renewal mode and where adults strive to answer the question of how to educate all students better (Glickman, 1993). Fullan (1993b) classified renewal as a continuing, everyday occurrence in flourishing schools. They are places where teams of teachers, administrators, and support staff have established norms of collegiality for discussing and debating questions about how to constantly improve the educational environments and opportunities for all learners.

Just as the primary goal of effective, successful schools is for no student to be left behind, so too is it the underlying goal of inclusive efforts in schools. Inclusive

education, as presented in the previous chapter, involves placing students with disabilities in classrooms alongside their peers without disabilities (Friend & Cook, 2000; Morgan et al., 1997). At the most appropriate level, the special education supports and services are provided within that setting. By rendering special education services directly in the general education classroom, the assumption is that low performing students and others considered at risk for school failure may too benefit from the accommodations and techniques afforded to identified students (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Friend & Cook, 2000; Walther-Thomas et al., 2000). The underlying premise of this research is that more inclusive practices in schools leads to a greater likelihood of meeting the diverse needs of all learners. Hence, greater inclusive education equates to more effective instructional practices and better schools in general.

Rooted in the aforementioned, this chapter provides a background for this research study. Related literature and research were reviewed in order to support the conceptual framework (see Figure 1) and to provide insight into the study. The chapter is divided into three sections: school reform, school-based leadership teams, and collaboration and inclusive education. The first segment presents an overview of the school reform literature as it relates to special education reform, the process of change, and the need for collaboration in schools. The second section highlights school-based leadership teams with perspectives on teaming, in general, and the characteristics and challenges of effective teams. The final section presents research and the associated literature on collaboration as related to the barriers and benefits in inclusive practices.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework guiding study.



School Reform

Since the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) published *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983), school reform efforts have inundated the U. S. education systems. Following this publication, general education reform passed through three movements during the late 1980s and 1990s: curriculum for excellence, school restructuring, and comprehensive schools (Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, & Leal, 1999). The curriculum for excellence movement attempted to increase the academic performance of school-aged children and youth by focusing on basic skills. This led to the proposed reshaping of the school governance during the school restructuring movement. In the most resent general education reform movement, the comprehensive school movement, the focus has been on the needs of students "who are especially disadvantaged, who have dropped out of school, or whose needs obviously are not fully met by the schools" (p. 101).

According to Slavin (2001), the various strategies for changing standards, accountability, assessments, and student programming in the educational systems across the nation have been haphazardly implemented, primarily unsuccessful, and consequently have only indirectly influenced schools to actually change. In an attempt to assist schools with these reform efforts, federal, state, and local education agencies have provided funding to school systems for specific, targeted programs (e.g., Title I, Special Education, English as a Second Language, Gifted and Talented, At-Risk). However, with the increasing diversity in schools, these isolated programs and discrete services performed outside the general education environment have become inappropriate and ineffective.

The integration of these diffused programs was further supported by the IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, 1997), which mandated greater access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities. Furthermore, with its emphasis on ensuring that children in every classroom enjoy the benefits of well-prepared teachers, research-based curricula, and safe learning environments, NCLB's (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) overall intent is to wrap all these reforms into a single package. This blend of new requirements, new incentives, and new resources is challenging states, schools, and districts to take immediate action in order to increase the success of all students. As students with disabilities increasingly participate in the general education setting alongside their peers without disabilities, the challenge is amplified.

A major responsibility of today's public schools is to guarantee a quality education for all students, in part through providing encouragement and guidance to teachers within the district. This challenge has become increasingly more difficult as a result of the pressures of high-stakes standardized testing and accountability standards, as well as the growing diversity of the student population (Germinario & Cram, 1998). Therefore, in order to meet the changing needs of students in today's highly diversified schools, the entire learning community must utilize collaborative approaches to create programs that effectively educate all students. In building this leadership capacity, a principal "ignites and nurtures each person's capacity to learn, grow, and change" (Wald & Castleberry, 2000, p. 18).

Reform and Special Education

Since the 1980s, the field of special education has also been experiencing the effects of reform efforts. These special education reforms paralleled, and then intersected

the general education movements. Like the curriculum for excellence movement, IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, 1997) with a push for LRE was a top-down initiative aimed at improving education. Recognizing that students with disabilities also had a right to an appropriate education, IDEA created the presumption in favor of inclusion or educating students with disabilities along with their peers without disabilities (Turnbull et al., 1999).

Another movement, the regular education initiative (REI), was "a call to encourage greater social and academic integration of students with disabilities by placing them into general education classrooms" (Sage & Burrello, 1994, p. 8). REI, paralleling the school restructuring movement, was another signal for empowering building-level administrators to make decisions regarding resource allocation at their schools (Turnbull et al., 1999). The REI was essentially based on four problems within the special education system: (a) Services for special and remedial children seemed hopelessly fragmented in distinct categorical programs; (b) Special and general education were dual systems in which the responsibility for educating students with learning and behavior problems fell on special programs; (c) Students in special programs segregated from nonhandicapped peers were being stigmatized; and (d) Rigid eligibility requirements for placements created conflicts (Jenkins, Pious, & Jewell, 1990). The REI was a thoughtful response to identified problems in educating lower performing students aimed at viewing the issue as a collective responsibility; however, there were problems associated with it. Turnbull and colleagues (1999) identified three specific problems: "general educators lacked training to implement its principles, special educators distrusted it, and the two disciplines ... had not collaborated around it" (p. 113).

The intersection of general and special education reform resulted in the inclusion movement. With a strong emphasis on collaboration, like the comprehensive school and school restructuring movements, it also fostered student and family friendships, choices, and positive contributions (Turnbull et al., 1999). In 1994 and in the midst of this push for inclusion, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, launched the Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform. The purpose of this center was to study the interaction between general and special education policies and reform efforts and their impact on students with disabilities. Although collaboration between general and special educators was the goal of the general education movements, McLaughlin, Henderson, and Rhim (1998) found that these goals were not being met in practice, primarily because special educators played an unsubstantiated role in the general school reform movement, in part because their views were not sought when the reform movements were developed.

The most recent school reform movement involving standards, assessments, and accountability most notably impacts special education at the secondary level. For example, graduation requirements based on exit exams will indisputably decrease the number of special education students who receive high school diplomas (Edgar, Patton, & Day-Vines, 2002; Vernon et al., in press). Subsequently, higher standards and the rigorous testing and accountability set by these reform activities often result in the exclusion of special education students. Furthermore, referrals of students to special education are estimated to increase because of the use of standards and high-stakes testing involved in reform efforts (Edgar et al., 2002).

The common defense of those who are resistant to change and want to maintain the status quo is that of the swinging pendulum (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001) or the "this too shall pass" attitude. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) offered a different perspective of school reform, implying that it matures and evolves under effective leadership, as opposed to moving from one trend to the next and back again. For instance, the 1970s consisted of the teacher-proof curriculum, which "was an attempt to link research to practice by making research a marketable product for consumer use in schools" (p. 39). This was followed by mandated changes and shared decision-making in the 1980s, student performance outcomes in the 1990s and, finally, academic standards of the early 2000s. Katzenmeyer and Moller admitted that problems have occurred at each stage in these advancements; however, those reform initiatives and changes that have been successful within the individual schools were achieved, in part, through effective teaming and collaboration.

Change Process

Change, in general, has always been met with resistance primarily because it is unpredictable and loaded with uncertainty (Fullan, 1993a). The change efforts involved in creating more inclusive organizations are no exception. Change itself is met with great trepidation. Fullan (1997) stated, "You can't mandate what matters" (p. 22). Essentially, the more complex the change initiative, the less leaders can force people to change.

According to Spady (1998), school improvement has moved through three basic periods of change: technical tinkering, segmental change, and systemic change. The technical tinkering epoch tends to come and go. It is usually undertaken by individuals or small groups who hope to develop a workable model and grow it throughout the system.

Segmental change involves focusing on improving major components of the curricular program. Because of the relatively short lifespan of this type of change, Spady referred to this era as the "reform of the year" (p. 33). The final period, systemic change, involves redirecting, realigning, and restructuring the entire organization in order to achieve what stakeholders agree to be its fundamental purpose. Spady noted systemic change sometimes fails to improve student learning because it typically is not implemented at the classroom level due to the amount of autonomy individual teachers possess. That is, with relatively low supervision, teachers characteristically control the amount of change happening within their classrooms.

Despite the best of intentions, change often fails to happen. Often this is because organizations initiate change that is event-driven, not value-driven (Patterson, 1997). The NCEE (1983) attacked event-driven change stressing the ineffectualness of attempting one innovation at a time. Patterson's contempt for event changes that have little or no impact on educational change echoed this sentiment. The greatest change impact comes from value-driven change – systematic, systemic long-term change that transforms the fundamental organizational beliefs and practices within the school (Fullan, 2001; Patterson, 1997).

In order to adequately address the issues of change, schools must build collective responsibility among faculty and staff to cooperate, collaborate, and work toward their mission. A school's success in educating all students depends on the commitment and competence of the individuals working together within the school (Dexter, 2001). In a study on Professional Development Schools conducted at the University of Utah, researchers noted "school change, when it occurred, was triggered by efforts of individual

teachers or groups of teachers" (Hobbs, Bullough, Kauchak, Crow, & Stokes, 1998, School Change section, ¶3). Furthermore, Hobbs and colleagues documented few change efforts that penetrated the entire school – little evidence that the change involved at least the majority of the school's faculty surfaced. This grim discovery called for more teachers to be actively involved in schoolwide reform efforts. Moreover, in order to organize social, procedural, and human resources into effective cooperative actions, the faculty must have the authority and encouragement to work together toward a common, agreed upon purpose (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). Working together effectively in schools requires collaboration between faculty members and with administrators and other stakeholders.

Need for Collaboration in Schools

As we have entered the new millennium, many educational researchers and practitioners have predicted that a new collaboration movement is and will continue to be a fundamental component of schools (Friend & Cook, 2000; Pugach & Johnson, 1995; Turnbull et al., 1999). Successful collaboration is at the heart of many educational practices, including site-based management; peer evaluation, coaching, and mentoring; inclusion and co-teaching; and interdisciplinary curriculum and cooperative learning (Pugach & Johnson, 1995). According to Donaldson and Sanderson (1996), the need for collaboration in schools is based on three basic arguments: direct benefits for students, direct benefits for educators, and professional enrichment of the school's culture.

Direct benefits for students. As groups of educators share information regarding students, teaching practices, and their roles within the school, students directly benefit (Donaldson & Sanderson, 1996). Furthermore, teachers' repertoires are enriched, and

their effectiveness with the students grows. "The idea of two or more adults sharing information about a child resounds with two-heads-are-better-than-one logic" (p. 3). Above all, as the education of students has become more complex, the sense of bringing multiple resources to bear on tough teaching and learning problems seems convincing.

A study by Newmann and Wehlage (1997) supported the notion that closer collaboration for the daily pedagogical challenges found in classrooms actually promoted the improvement of teaching which brought significant benefits to students. Similarly, Lieberman and Miller's (1991) review of teaching conditions and professional development linked collaboration to enriched instruction, pupil-centered planning, and better learning outcomes. Teachers cannot improve their performance in isolation. They need compassionate and caring colleagues to give second opinions, share ideas that work with students, and help sustain new practices to benefit all learners (Darling-Hammond, 1993, 1997).

Direct benefits for educators. As educators learn to work together, their professional efficacy and sophistication flourish (Donaldson & Sanderson, 1996). According to Tschannen-Moran (2001), the push for collaboration has led to more joint decision-making opportunities, specifically among teachers and principals. Furthermore, she added:

> Teachers ... are viewed as having valuable knowledge and insights to contribute to decisions and consequently are given actual influence over the outcome of decisions. Not only are better quality decisions possible, but greater motivation and commitment on the part of teachers is often the results. (p. 309)

This contributes to a steady upward trend in the quality of their overall work within the school and, most important, with the students. Rosenholtz's study (1989) revealed, in what is called "moving" schools, that teachers had more opportunity for collegial contact and these contacts built norms of collaboration that made a difference in student achievement. Moving schools are learning-enriched schools where teachers work together in their quest for continuous school improvement (Rosenholtz, 1989).

Effective collaboration encompassing common goals, collegiality, shared decision-making and problem-solving, and teacher leadership contribute to enhanced morale and performance (Lieberman, 1995). According to Wasley (1991), "Studies indicate that teacher growth and change thrive in an environment ... where teachers are provided the time to reflect and to work together [and] where people are taught to work collaboratively ..." (cited in Donaldson & Sanderson, 1996, p. 56). Essentially, collaboration's benefit to educators provides another indirect benefit to the students.

Enrichment of the school's culture. Finally, the third reason to promote collaboration in schools lies in the professional enrichment of the school's culture. Many notable education writers argue that schools can move forward only if decision-making authority and deliberate autonomy are jointly held by those closest to the students (Lieberman, 1995; Schlechty, 2001; Sergiovanni, 1994). Barth (1990) demonstrated how adults working together in "communities of learners" created new cultures that gave every child and adult a legitimate place in the school. Basically, this new culture is nothing short of establishing new norms – that is, norms of collaboration. Although this assertion is backed by little empirical support within the context of schools, it maintains widespread support in practitioner and policy communities and is reinforced by

researchers and writers from the business world (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Marshall, 1995; Senge, 1990).

Climate in an Organizational Context

The history and measurement of organizational climate in schools began in the early 1960s, when Halpin and Croft (1962) published their ground-breaking study on the climate of elementary schools (cited in Griffith, 1999; Hoy et al., 1991; Imants & van Zoelen, 1995). In fact, school climate was among the first concepts in school organizational theory and research to be empirically researched (Imants & van Zoelen, 1995).

The definition of school climate is similar to that of organizational climate. According to Hoy and colleagues (1991), school climate is defined as "the relatively enduring quality of the school environment that is experienced by participants, affects their behavior, and is based on their collective perception of behavior in schools" (p. 10). It is further conceptualized along two interconnected continua: open to closed and healthy to unhealthy (Hoy & Tarter, 1997).

Measuring Climate

The first continuum ranges from an open climate to a closed one. A closed climate is one in which teachers and administrators do their work by going through the motions, basically doing no more than what is required by a contract (Sweetland & Hoy, 2000). In a closed climate, principals stress routine details and seemingly unnecessary busywork while teachers counter with the very minimum and demonstrate little, if any, contentment with their work (Hoy & Tarter, 1997). In contrast, an open climate is characterized by a high degree of legitimacy, in that all staff members are genuine and

open in their interactions with each other (Imants & van Zoelen, 1995). Hoy and Tarter (1997) described open climates as places where "cooperation and respect within and between the faculty and principal" (p. 18) are evident. An open climate is an environment where educators are committed to their students and willing to assist them in any way possible (Hoy & Tarter, 1997). However, Imants and van Zoelen (1995) warned that weaknesses occur when open climates are combined with informal and friendly environments, possibly creating a lack of task engagement for the school.

School climate also fluctuates along a continuum from healthy to unhealthy. Sweetland and Hoy (2000) described unhealthy climates as places where participants, including teachers and students, are forced to be, as opposed to where they want to be. An unhealthy climate is marked by conflict and turmoil. These are environments where teachers have a propensity to not like their students, fellow teachers, or administrators (Hoy & Tarter, 1997). In an unhealthy climate, in turn, principals view teachers with suspicion and believe that close supervision and control are necessary components of management (Sweetland & Hoy, 2000). At the other end of the spectrum are healthy climate schools. They are the antithesis of the unhealthy climate, in that they are marked by institutional integrity (Hoy et al., 1991; Sweetland & Hoy, 2000) and positive relationships between students, teachers, and principals (Sweetland & Hoy, 2000). Hoy and Tarter (1997) described the healthy school climate as "a positive place [where] the faculty emphasizes academic achievement and sets high and achievable expectations for the students. Teachers enjoy friendly and supportive relations with each other [and] administrators have positive, collegial relationships with the rest of the staff" (p. 1).

Positive school climates are both open and healthy (Hoy et al., 1991). Indicators of positive, open, and healthy school climates are associated with student achievement and the overall operations of effective schools (Cullen et al., 1999; McEvoy & Welker, 2000). Furthermore, effective schools share common characteristics with school climate in that they have "students who are enthusiastic, with high expectations for achievement; dedicated, cooperative teachers; and relationships characterized by feelings of mutual respect, support, and trust" (Smey-Richman, 1991, p. 1). Climate provides the foundation for an organizational context.

Dimensions of School Climate

It is important to reiterate that no single factor alone determines school climate. Based on the works of Hoy and his colleagues, the social processes survey used in this study assessed six dimensions of school climate: teacher trust, collegial leadership, teacher professionalism, academic press, organizational citizenship, and collective teacher efficacy. These are not only vital aspects of climate, they are the underpinnings of effective schools. The following section identifies these climate and social processes dimensions with a brief description of each.

Teacher trust. Trust is defined as one's willingness to be vulnerable to another. Such vulnerability is based on confidence in several facets important in building trust, including reliability, competence, openness, and honesty (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Three areas of trust were assessed in this study: trust in principal, trust in colleagues, and trust in students and parents.

Collegial leadership. Leadership plays an important and significant role in school climate; however, it only fosters school effectiveness indirectly (Griffith, 1999). Collegial

leadership refers to behaviors of principals that are supportive, democratic, and concerned with the social needs and welfare of the faculty, as well as achieving the goals of the school (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Hoy et al., 1991). Collegial leaders are friendly, yet set clear teacher expectations and high, achievable standards for student performance (Hoy & Tarter, 1997).

Principals deemed collegial leaders are described as facilitators who bring together all the elements of successful schools (Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999). Specifically, these leaders empower teachers to make decisions regarding instructional practices, allow teacher participation in decision-making processes, and develop shared visions regarding student learning (Griffith, 1999; Hoy & Tarter, 1997; Miller et al., 1999). Miller and colleagues (1999) emphasized that strong administrative leadership built on the above characteristics "is the foundation for a positive school climate" (Implications for Practice section, ¶ 5).

Teacher professionalism. DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2001) defined teacher professionalism as the "teacher behavior that is characterized by commitment to students and engagement in the teaching task" (p. 436). Professional teacher behavior is also marked by respect for the competence of colleagues, autonomous judgment, and collaboration (Hoy & Tarter, 1997). Teachers exhibiting high professionalism behaviors interact openly and cooperatively, and continuously support and trust each other (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Teachers are considered the most important element in schools with positive climates. According to Hanson and Childs (1998), people, specifically teachers, are "the one resource that is guaranteed to make a difference" (p. 17).

Academic press. Academic press or academic expectations describes schools that set high, achievable goals and standards for their students (Hoy et al., 1991). Schools demonstrating academic press are characterized by their drive and quest for excellence (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Parents, teachers, and principals in schools exhibiting academic press exert pressure for school improvement guided toward meeting the high, yet attainable expectations (Hoy & Tarter, 1997).

Teachers and administrators in these schools create atmospheres that are orderly, serious, and focused on academics and overall achievement of all students (Hoy & Tarter, 1997). Students rise to the challenges of these expectations by working harder and respecting academic accomplishments of their fellow classmates (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Students strive to achieve, persist, and gain the respect of their peers and teachers through their accomplishments with academic success (Hoy et al., 1991).

Organizational citizenship. Organizational citizenship is marked by the willingness of teachers to work above and beyond their contractual obligations. This behavior is also demonstrated in their readiness to help new faculty members and substitute teachers (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Additionally, teachers display organizational citizenship behaviors by volunteering for committees and sponsoring extracurricular activities. They are prompt to school and meetings and make good use of classroom instructional time.

Collective efficacy. In schools, collective efficacy is the belief that faculty and staff have the ability to achieve important goals of the school. These goals include both instructional practices and student discipline (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000). Teacher efficacy involves the collective perceptions the faculty members hold about their

capacity to achieve meaningful student learning, despite the barriers or challenges that may be present making that learning difficult.

The information discerned from climate and social processes assessments can play important roles in school improvement and reform by providing a means by which principals and improvement teams can narrow, focus, and guide their reform efforts through attacking those areas of greatest need (Freiberg, 1998; Hoy & Tarter, 1997). The realistic aim of conducting a climate assessment should be to describe the actual behavior of organizational members for the purposes of managing and changing those behaviors (Goddard et al., 2000; Hart, Wearing, Conn, Carter, & Dingle, 2000; Hoy & Tarter, 1997). Furthermore, research indicates that schools are more likely to improve through reform measures when teachers feel a sense of ownership, empowerment, and control over the nature of change, which is the essence of climate (*Education Week*, n.d.). Working toward improved school climate indicates that committed individuals within the school are making mindful efforts to enhance and enrich the circumstances in schools so students can learn more effectively (Hanson & Childs, 1998; Hart et al., 2000). McEvoy and Welker (2000) acknowledged:

> Effective schools share common characteristics [with schools exhibiting positive climates], including student perceptions of high expectations for achievement, effective administrative leadership, a shared mission among teachers and staff, a commitment to appropriate assessments, students' sense of efficacy with respect to learning, and student perceptions of a safe environment in which to learn. (p. 135)

Accordingly, schools with positive climates are associated with important outcomes of schooling; hence, they are more apt to be effective schools (Wilson & McGrail, 1987).

School-Based Leadership Teams

Leadership teams are popular vehicles for meeting specific performance and change objectives required by continuous improvement and innovation (Dexter, 2001). Teams are small groups of committed stakeholders who will get the task completed. They bring more diverse resources to an assignment than any single person can. In many workforce environments, important decisions, once only made by top level administrators, are now made by teams. The accomplishments of these groups can set the tone and establish a standard for learning together in larger organizations (Senge, 1990). Furthermore, teams contribute significant achievement in businesses, charities, the military, government, communities, and schools (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993).

Arranging personnel into teams has been identified as an important factor linked to the process of improving schools and implementing change (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). Accordingly, Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, and Smith (1994) proposed that teams, not individuals, are the fundamental units of learning in a modern organization. Similarly, the new professional is not a teacher working alone. New professionalism will require planned and purposeful efforts to reach higher levels of mastery in data-driven, outcome-oriented, team-based approaches that raise levels of achievement for all students (Dexter, 2001).

School improvement teams are one model used to implement shared decision-making and leadership (Butler, 1995). Typically composed of principals and teacher representatives, the major goal of these teams is teacher empowerment. School reform

proposals often necessitate implementation of group effort models that make use of innovative strategies for leadership (Barth, 1990; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fullan, 1993a; Schlechty, 2001).

In his study aimed at determining what makes school improvement teams successful, Dexter (2001) concluded that these teams had clearly defined and well understood goals, as well as plans for measuring success. Teachers and principals took responsibility for building leadership capacity. Further, the teams adopted process models, which included teaming, communication, decision-making, and collaboration skills along with implementation of procedures to overcome common barriers. Finally, trust and mutual respect among team members were evident.

Wilson and Corbett (1991) documented the changes that occurred in middle schools during their first year of restructuring by observing as they planned for improvement, reviewing documents, and interviewing members from four different middle schools, as well as administrators. The authors found that the team members and administrators related to one another differently than before the implementation of the teams. Additionally, Wilson and Corbett determined that collaboration, ownership, and professional respect increased while a collective sense of purpose created a greater willingness to work harder.

The leadership these school-based teams provide is critical for improving the quality of education for students both with and without disabilities. Research and literature from the corporate sector also support the importance of teams within business organizations (Campion et al., 1996; Katzenbach, 1998; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Senge et al., 1994), which accordingly can be applied to the school setting. Consequently,

students, teachers, administrators, and other education stakeholders will increasingly work in teams, reflecting a pattern widely evident in other workplaces (Marsh, 1999).

"TEAM" recently became a popular acronym originally coined by Secretan (1997), meaning "Together Everyone Achieves More." Katzenbach and Smith (1993) described a team as, "A small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable" (p. 45). Senge and colleagues (1994) defined teams as "any group of people who need each other to accomplish a result" (p. 354). Essentially, a team is a group working together interdependently.

Teams are recognized as a critical component of most enterprises. They are typically characterized as the predominant unit for decision-making and getting things done. The purpose of teaming is to acquire knowledge, improve it, and pass it on to others within the organization (Robbins & Finley, 1995). Teaming becomes essential as an organization makes serious moves to become more customer-driven and process focused (Zenger, Musselwhite, Hurson, & Perrin, 1994). The rapid pace of change in the world has put pressure on modern management to rethink how best to meet customer needs. For many organizations, the solution has been teaming. According to Dumaine (1994), corporate America is having a love affair with teams, "When teams work, there's nothing like them for turbo-charging productivity" (p. 88).

Much of the literature supports that teams outperform individuals acting alone (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Robbins & Finley, 1995; Zenger et al., 1994). Katzenbach and Smith (1993) contended that teams can increase productivity, improve communication, be versatile, be creative in problem-solving, make high-quality

decisions, produce better-quality goods and services, improve processes, and integrate differences. Furthermore, people are the central resources in any organization and teams bring more diverse resources to task than a single employee (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Challenges of Teaming

Despite major benefits of teaming, challenges do exist. Barriers include teacher isolation, lack of administrative support, and insufficient time to collaborate (Sharpe & Templin, 1997; Short, 1994). The list of other hurdles include lack of planning, training, resources, a common knowledge base, as well as existing hierarchical relationships and teacher overload.

Traditional norms of teacher autonomy and isolation present prominent challenges to effective teaming. Because teachers typically work alone during planning and instruction, working in teams "cuts against many of the occupational norms of teaching including norms of individuality, privacy and isolation" (Short, 1994, Interdisciplinary Teaching Teams section, ¶3). According to Sharpe and Templin (1997), professional isolation exists because within "the public school workplace, teachers' roles are compartmentalized into specific subject matters and into related professional activities that are very narrowly defined and limited to their classroom activities" (Example section, ¶3).

Administration or leadership that is tentative and inconsistent is another great challenge to teams (Robbins & Finley, 1995). The traditional role of administrators during decision-making and problem-solving was to initiate top-down bureaucratic procedures where collaboration was the exception (Dee & Henkin, 2001). Like teachers,

administrators who are accustomed to working alone, may experience frustration, disappointment, and loss of power and control in the presence of teamwork.

Finding time to plan, organize, gather data, and meet is considered the greatest obstacle for members of teams in schools (Dee & Henkin, 2001). While lack of time should not be an excuse for doing nothing, it does provide a roadblock, especially in schools where additional meetings may be viewed as time teachers must take from their classroom responsibilities (Lieberman, 1995). In a study of 25 teachers working on leadership teams, Ovando (1994) found that time demands deterred some teachers from their teaching focus. These teachers tried to minimize the amount of time they lost in their classrooms by performing their leadership duties at a variety of times (e.g., planning time, lunch, release time, personal time). According to Robins and Finley (1995), school teams comprised of teachers often fail because they are seen as a device to complete a task without tools, vision, rewards, or clarity needed to succeed.

Characteristics of Effective Teams

Effective teaming is the aim of school-based leadership teams. Several characteristics of effective teaming emerged from the literature, including (a) open communication, (b) trust, (c) supportive environments, (d) clear goals, and (e) collaboration (Brown, 2001; Dee & Henkin, 2001; Dexter, 2001; Larson & LaFasto, 1989).

Open Communication. Teams and team members must communicate constantly. Consequently, a two-way system of open communication must be in place, throughout the entire organization. Not surprisingly, communication skills are essential to team effectiveness (Wellins et al., 1994). In a study of more than 50 schools, a group of

researchers (Lambert, Collay, Dietz, Kent, & Richert, 1997) found patterns of common emerging themes, among them communication. Lambert and her colleagues established that effective teams had honest, open communication within the team and throughout the school organization. This honest, open communication enabled team members to develop social bonds, collaborate, trust, and accomplish their goals (Dee & Henkin, 2001). Without effective, open communication, teamwork fails.

Trust. Essentially defined as that which is extended to a person to whom one is vulnerable (Tschannen-Moran, 2001), trust is positively related to several of the work process factors, including the amount of effort put into doing the work and the talents applied to work (Larson & LaFasto, 1989). In their extensive studies on teams and teamwork, Yeatts and Hyten (1998) found that when trust was reported as being high, team members spent less time and energy worrying about what others were thinking or doing and more time and energy on actually doing the work. Furthermore, "team members who trusted one another were more willing to ask for assistance or allow a more talented team member to perform tasks they were less skilled at doing" (p. 102). In brief, trust contributes to organizational and team effectiveness and is a required element for both cooperation and effective collaboration in schools (Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Tschannen-Moran, 2001).

Supportive environments. Promoting a supportive environment was another characteristic identified as essential in order for teams to be effective. Barriers to change can be overcome if teachers can be helped to believe in their capacity to change by having their issues and concerns addressed. School leaders must use both words and actions to convince teachers that their efforts do matter (Brown, 2001). According to

DuFour and Eaker (1998), this can be done by establishing effective communication networks, opportunities for reflection and feedback, necessary time and materials for collaboration, and structural systems that involve teachers in decision making processes. A team is supported when

> ... the team is given the resources it needs to get the job done. The team is supported by those individuals and agencies outside the team who are capable of contributing to the team's success. The team is sufficiently recognized for its accomplishments. And the reward and incentive structure is clear, viewed as appropriate by team members, and tied to performance. (Larson & LaFasto, 1989, p. 109)

In a study conducted by Campion and colleagues (1996), survey data collected from more than 60 financial service teams revealed this supportive context (e.g., training, managerial support, resources, information, encouragement) as one of the top three characteristics of teams.

Clear goals. Setting clear goals has been recognized as another essential characteristic of teaming. Setting intermediate and long-range goals is a "deliberative, communicative process, whereby members envision alternative futures and develop criteria for effective solutions" (Dee & Henkin, 2001, p. 28). In a sample of interviews covering more than 75 teams, Larson and LaFasto (1989) found in every case that when highly effective teams were identified, they were described as having a clear understanding of their well defined goals. The researchers noted two insights about teams that emerged categorically and without fail from their respondents.

> First, high performance teams have both a clear understanding of the goal to be achieved and a belief that the goal embodies a worthwhile or important result. Second, whenever an *ineffectively* functioning team was identified and described, the explanation for the team's ineffectiveness involved, in one sense or another, the goal. (Larson & LaFasto, 1989, p. 27)

Clear goals can direct team members' attention and action. Clear goals are diverse, distinctive, precise, and most important, measurable (Yeatts & Hyten, 1998). Clear, measurable goals lead to greater outputs than do vague goals.

Collaboration. Finally, the major key to effective, successful school-based leadership teams, as with successful teams in the corporate world, is collaboration. Collaboration is an interactive planning process where "team interactions throughout the process are characterized by mutual respect, trust, and open communication" (Welch, 1998, p. 28). Collaborative conditions result in professionals who are constantly learning (Dexter, 2001). Increasing collaboration in organizations requires structures and processes whereby every member of the group is assigned to a team, working collaboratively toward a shared, common purpose (DuFour, 1997; Pinchot, 1998).

Collaboration supports problem-solving and decision-making by increasing the range and number of possible solutions advanced through combining the knowledge, skills, and resources from a range of professionals with diverse experiences (Welch, 1998). In order to monitor, evaluate, and refine educational programs and services, Welch contended that collaboration must extend beyond simply brainstorming and allocating resources. That is, true collaboration implies that "all members of the school community

are accountable for ensuring more quality educational services for all students" (Benefits of Collaboration section ¶1).

According to Lieberman (1995), collaboration creates new structures (e.g., school-based leadership teams) that allows members to share knowledge, to increase skills, to learn from one another and that reduces the gap between research and practice. Teachers should be allowed and encouraged to come together as professionals in order to engage in dialogue around a shared knowledge base about students, teaching, learning, and change. However, although collaboration is typically desired, the practice is difficult because of the nature and common practices of teacher isolation in our schools (Barth, 1990).

Historically, teacher isolation has been the norm in schools – that is, teachers work in very close proximity, yet independently (Rosenholtz, 1989). The two primary reasons for teacher isolation were due to professional socialization that encouraged teachers to solve their own problems individually and the physical structure of the buildings, which forces teachers to work in separate classrooms with little opportunity to interact (Friend & Cook, 2000). Educators can increase their productivity if they learn to work together as professionals within the learning community (Wald & Castleberry, 2000).

The dimensions of professional learning communities include shared values and vision, supportive and shared leadership, supportive and collaborative conditions, and shared personal practice (Barth, 1990; Brown, 2001; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). Brown (2001) stated, "Significant and continuous improvement happens only when administrators collaborate with teachers and teachers collaborate with

teachers to promote school change" (p. 154). In a qualitative study designed to observe and describe the development of teachers on school leadership teams and the impact of this teacher leadership within individual schools, Brown identified several barriers and supports for teaming in schools, among them principal-team relationships, communication, and team focus. Furthermore, the benefits of teaming, which included collegiality and opportunities for teachers to lead, provided the necessary framework for professional learning communities.

With collaboration comes synergy (McNerney, 1994). Synergy is "a work climate that enables groups of individuals to accomplish together what they could not do by themselves" (Dee & Henkin, 2001, p. 7). The responsibility of school leaders is to promote all teachers as leaders by empowering their participation in school reform efforts, inspiring them to become competent in their practice, and encouraging their collaboration with all constituents for the benefit of all students (Brown, 2001).

Collaboration and Inclusive Education

Nearly a quarter of a century ago, the emphasis of special education research shifted from how and what to teach students with disabilities to where to teach them (Sage & Burrello, 1994). Subsequently, researchers and educators began thinking about how students with disabilities were affected by placement in the general education environment. Due to new interpretations of the LRE principle, the general education setting, as opposed to more restrictive settings, became the preferred placement for students with disabilities. This spawned a trend toward more collaborative practices within schools.

As more and more students with disabilities are participating in the general education setting, effective restructuring of education must incorporate professional collaboration (Hourcade & Bauwens, 2001). Teacher assistance teams, cooperative teaching, and collaborative-consultation and are just three examples of educational models brought about by inclusive practices that are based on high quantities of collaboration.

In response to the LRE concept introduced in the 1970s, more school-level teacher assistance teams began to develop in order to address difficulties teachers encountered due to increased numbers of diverse students (e.g., second-language learners, students at risk for school failure, and students with disabilities) being served in the general education setting (Zetlin, 2000). According to Walther-Thomas and colleagues (2000), teacher assistance teams were originally created because teachers often lacked "the professional preparation, confidence, or experience needed to deal with difficult-to-teach students while meeting the instructional needs of 20 to 30 others in general education classes" (p. 140).

Today, teacher assistance teams, also known by other names such as prereferral intervention teams, intervention assistance teams, student support teams, and instructional support teams, are being established to assist general education teachers in accommodating students who experience academic or behavioral difficulty before problems escalate (Rock & Zigmond, 2001; Walther-Thomas et al., 2000; Zetlin, 2000). According to Rock and Zigmond (2001), these teams typically operate under four guiding principles:

(a) to ensure effective use of general education services for all students prior to referral for special education services,

(b) to establish building-based, teacher problem-solving teams to assist teachers,

(c) to systematically screen students prior to referral for special education services using assessment and instructional techniques, and

(d) to provide support and assistance to general education teachers serving students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. (*Intervention Assistance* ¶2)

In brief, these teams offer direct and indirect supports and services to teachers through collaborative approaches to problem-solving.

As inclusive practices have become more prominent in schools, two models of teaching have emerged: cooperative teaching and collaborative-consultation. Although these teaching models are not new concepts in education, they have recently resurfaced as a means to meet the needs of students with disabilities within the inclusive setting.

Cooperative teaching, more commonly referred to as co-teaching, is defined as two or more professionals possessing distinct sets of knowledge and skills, teaching together on an ongoing basis for at least a portion of the day (Hourcade & Bauwens, 2001; Walther-Thomas et al., 2000). Typically, these educators consist of a general education teacher primarily responsible for content and a special educator with strengths in teaching strategies and accommodations.

According to Walther-Thomas and her colleagues (2000), collaborative-consultation as a support service is rooted in consultation models used in many other professional fields (e.g., medicine, mental health, behavior psychology). Idol, Paolucci-Whitcomb, and Nevin (1986) defined collaborative-consultation as "an interactive

process which enables people with diverse expertise to generate creative solutions to mutually defined problems" (cited in Walther-Thomas et al., 2000, p. 162). Described as indirect collaboration (Hourcade & Bauwens, 2001), it is considered an indirect support service (Walther-Thomas et al., 2000) because the teacher receives assistance outside the classroom from consultants who typically do not interact with the students.

These examples provide support for the notion that collaboration is "the foundation of successful inclusive education" (Hourcade & Bauwens, 2001, p. 242). In turn, inclusive practices cannot exist without collaboration. With this in mind, it is important to discuss both the opportunities and challenges in inclusive education.

Opportunities in Inclusive Education

Within the past two decades, inclusion has become a widely discussed and debated topic. The rationales of those who support inclusive practices have encompassed social justice, promotion of social relationships, the questionable effects of traditional pull-out programs, and the reconceptualization of models of educational services to meet the needs of all students (Sharpe, York, & Knight, 1994). Proponents of more inclusive practices argue that the collaboration taking place in general education environments reinforces the academic progress of students with disabilities "because they are held to higher expectations, exposed to more challenging content, and inspired by the example of their nondisabled peers" (Willis, 1994, p. 2).

Several authors and researchers have discussed the benefits of changing from the traditional isolated educational arrangement to one that is more collaborative and inclusive (Lipsky & Gartner, 1997; McLaughlin & Verstegen, 1998; Stainback &

Stainback, 1996; Walther-Thomas et al., 2000). Sage (1997) summed it up best when stating that inclusive opportunities:

- help all students feel welcome and feel a sense of belonging,
- help students to become aware that everyone has strengths and weaknesses,
- ensure that students form an appreciation of diversity in relation to individual differences,
- present opportunities for students to observe and model positive social interactions, and
- result in greater availability of adults to facilitate educational development of all students. (p. 219)

Moreover, support for students with disabilities in the general education setting could lead to better ways of meeting the needs of other students considered at risk for school failure, such as those with lower than average academic and cognitive skills or second-language learners (Bundt, 2001). Thus, the role of the special educators in inclusive education is expanded to provide support to classroom teachers for any child with problems, not just students labeled as having disabilities (Pugach & Johnson, 1995).

Challenges in Inclusive Education

Although the majority of arguments against inclusive education typically surround the topic of full inclusion – the practice of placing all students regardless of their disability in the general education classroom setting within their neighborhood schools for the entire school day (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1997), these conflicting views are worth noting. Those who oppose inclusion argue that, although methods of collaborative learning and group instruction are preferred, the traditional classroom size

and resources are often inadequate for managing and accommodating many students with disabilities without producing adverse effects on the classroom as a whole (LoVette, 1996).

Although teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities have undergone considerable scrutiny, both general and special educators tend to agree that inclusion does not work in all situations because many of them are not adequately prepared to educate students with disabilities in the inclusive setting (Cole, 1999; LoVette, 1996; Sharpe et al., 1994; Tapasak & Walther-Thomas, 1999). For example, it is implied that many of the general education students are often distracted by the behaviors of their classmates with disabilities and therefore, are unable to concentrate on or complete their tasks (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1997; LoVette, 1996). Accordingly, anecdotal records revealed a higher instance of behavior problems among students in the inclusive settings (Cook, Tankersley, Cook, & Landrum, 2000; Daniel & King, 1997). In yet another study, students with disabilities in the inclusive environment received a disproportionate amount of negative comments regarding behavior on their report cards than their peers without disabilities (Tapasak & Walther-Thomas, 1999). Daniel and King (1997) found inclusive education teachers devoted so much time to discipline problems that time spent on instruction was greatly diminished.

Hallahan and Kauffman (1997) noted that the academic needs of students with disabilities are not always met in the inclusive classroom, causing many of these students to fall further behind their peers without disabilities. Furthermore, LoVette (1996) and Peltier (1997) indicated that students without disabilities suffer in an inclusive environment because the general educators focus on providing extra instruction and

activities for students with special needs. Paradoxically, Sharpe and colleagues (1994) failed to find any significant academic differences between the performances of students without disabilities educated in the inclusive setting and those not participating in inclusion.

While these challenges of inclusive practices are real, many of them can be alleviated via collaborative practices. The task of finding the most appropriate educational placement is becoming more difficult with the changing demographics and increasingly diverse backgrounds and experiences of students entering public schools. Inclusive education enables teachers with differing qualifications and expertise to work together through collaboration and utilize different techniques and strategies in order to address the individual and diverse needs of all learners (Burrello, Lashley, & Beatty, 2001). Several authors have outlined factors necessary for inclusive programs to succeed (Lipsky & Gartner, 1997; Stainback & Stainback, 1996; Walther-Thomas et al., 2000). Among these factors were visionary leadership, collaborative cultures, and ongoing support for students and staff. All of these require changes in leadership and basic operations of schools, including more collaboration at all levels.

This review of the literature has highlighted the three major components of this study: school reform, leadership teams, and inclusive education. The relationship between them, although seemingly complex, is relatively fundamental. Inclusive efforts in schools are part of the current educational reform era and, therefore, require certain changes in order to be effective. Additionally, inclusive practices cannot occur without collaboration. Thus, the premise of this study is that through teamwork – teachers working together, interdependently, toward a common goal – educators' collaboration

skills as well as the schools' inclusive practices will be promoted. This literature review supports the contention that through the development of leadership teams, schools can promote successful implementation changes, sustain school improvements, and lead to greater collaboration in schools, resulting better educational opportunities for all students.

Chapter III – Methods

Effective teacher leadership can promote successful implementation and continuation of changes to support and sustain school improvements and lead to greater collaboration in schools. While there is a body of literature on these topics, research is lacking that specifically examines the role of leadership teams, comprised primarily of teacher leaders, on whole-school improvement. Furthermore, few studies have addressed the topics of leadership teams and the improvement of educational opportunities for students with disabilities. There is a need to identify what makes collaborative leadership teams successful and what impact they have on special education service delivery, specifically inclusion.

This chapter on the research methods used in the present study is divided into the following sections: (a) a restatement of the research questions, (b) a description of and rationale for using the case-study design, (c) an explanation of the researcher's role, (d) a description of the setting and participants selected for the study, (e) a discussion of the data sources along with a rationale for the data gathering procedures and analyses selected, and (f) a discussion of the ethical safeguards and considerations.

Research Questions

The primary research question guiding this study was the following: How did the collaborative practices and processes of school-based leadership teams promote inclusive efforts in schools? More specifically, what initiatives prompted by these teams impacted

the perceptions of faculty members of their school and of educating students with disabilities?

Additionally, the following three subquestions offered insight to this overarching research question:

1. To what extent did faculty members believe their school-based leadership team facilitated change that promoted inclusion of students with disabilities?
2. How did the leadership team project impact classroom practices?
3. To what extent did the school-based leadership teams increase opportunities for students with disabilities to be served and participate within the general education setting?

Method

This research used a case-study design to answer the research questions. A case is defined as "an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group" (Merriam, 1988, p. 9). This study design was chosen to enable the researcher to collect data within the bounded system or the real-life contexts in which they occurred (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2000). In essence, "a case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry" (Stake, 2000, p. 436).

A case study containing more than a single case is referred to as a multiple-case-study design. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), "multiple cases offer the researcher an even deeper understanding of processes and outcomes of cases, the chance to test hypotheses, and a good picture of locally grounded causality" (p. 26). Each case was carefully selected so it either predicts similar results or a literal replication, produces

contrasting but predictable results, or produces a theoretical replication (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The bounded system in this study was a grant project designed to promote more inclusive education through the development of school-based leadership teams at three school sites; therefore, it required a multiple-case-study approach.

When compared to other qualitative methods, case-study design is more adapted to a description of the multiple realities encountered at any given site (Merriam, 1988). Interpretation is both limited and enriched by detailed descriptions of contexts that make it possible to take the reader into the setting (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This case study takes readers on a journey that attempted to gain teachers' perceptions of their school climate and school-based leadership teams while identifying the impact of those teams on creating more inclusive environments for students with disabilities. Through the process of naturalistic generalization, this "researcher's narrative provides opportunity for vicarious experience, ... the reader comes to know some things told, as if he or she had experienced it" (Stake, 2000, p. 442).

Case-study methodology tends to be holistic, as the study attempts to describe the phenomenon in its entirety through detailed descriptions, including as many variables as possible and portraying interactions over a period of time (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data collection in case-study research is extensive, drawing on multiple sources of information (Creswell, 1998). Specifically, this study utilized direct observations, documentation, participant observations, informal interviews, and focus groups.

The Researcher's Role

The role of the researcher in this study was that of a participant observer. As the project coordinator, the researcher visited the three participating schools on a regular

basis (once to twice a month), thereby developing a rapport with team members and other faculty. Yet, the researcher's actual degree of participation in the daily activities of the school was generally low, which is characteristic of the participant observer who maintains a degree of detachment (Lancy, 1993).

One goal of this case study was to develop an understanding of the process of teambuilding that was experienced by the participants while they attempted to become a more inclusive school. This viewpoint is called the emic perspective. "The researcher obtains this perspective though direct observation of the participants – sometimes called "insiders" – as they behave naturally in the field, and through informal conversations with them" (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 548). In this case, the challenge was for the researcher to combine participation and observation so as to be capable of understanding the project as an insider while describing the project for outsiders. Since elements of teaching, advocacy, and interpretation are essential to the discovery nature of qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 1998), the researcher's more than 10 years of personal experience as an educator and teacher leader helped to build credibility and trust with respondents and was a valuable resource in conducting the research.

Participants and Setting

Two upper-elementary schools (fifth to sixth grade and fourth through seventh grade) and one middle school (sixth to eighth grade) who were involved in the DSLT grant project were the participants. Each school developed a school-based leadership team consisting of approximately 10 members. School A had 11 members, School B had 10 members, and School C had 12 members. These members included principals, assistant principals, general and special education teachers in all disciplines, and, in some

instances, support staff (e.g., counselors, specialists). In addition to team self-evaluations from each DSLT where data from vocal members were captured, individual informal interviews were held with eight members of the DSLT (two from School A and three each from Schools B and C) who tended to be at the peripheral of the group. The purpose of these interviews was to discern the viewpoints of members who typically worked behind the scenes and who were not administrators, chairpersons, or characteristically overt in their opinions during team meetings. The same questions guided 19 non-team faculty members during focus groups held at each of the schools.

The after-school focus groups were difficult to coordinate due to the number of other responsibilities and obligations the teachers held. For this portion of the study, the largest number of participants came from School B. The principal scheduled the focus group session at the same time as a regularly scheduled faculty meeting and excused the eight teachers who volunteered to participate in the study from attending the meeting. With only three non-team member teachers volunteering for the study, School A had to reschedule their focus group three times due to snow and inclement weather days when school was canceled. This turned out to be an advantage for the study, however. The principal was finally able to schedule the focus group during an early release day. Because the teachers were not required to stay after school to attend, three more teachers asked to participate, raising the participation rate to six teachers from School A. In School C, originally seven teachers expressed an interest in the focus group interview. Two of them withdrew due to unexpected commitments that arose the day of the session. As a result, School C had the smallest attendance with only five teachers represented. (The School Profiles in Appendix A also contains Participant Demographics.)

By concentrating on a single phenomenon the researcher aimed to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon (Gall et al., 1998). In this research, the single phenomenon was the promotion of inclusive efforts through more collaborative practices at specific schools where inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education environment was basically non-existent. The significant factors, in turn, were the barriers and supports influencing these leadership teams in their efforts to promote more inclusive opportunities for students with mild to moderate disabilities.

Data Sources

As part of the data-gathering process, the following documents were obtained, reviewed, and analyzed: DSLT meeting notices, agendas, minutes, action plans, correspondences, grant proposal and evaluations, end-of-year reports, and participant evaluations collected from May 2001 to March 2003. Additional data sources included observations of team members and non-team members in their classrooms and schools, as well as during meetings and workshops. Finally, focus groups were conducted with 19 non-team faculty members and informal interviews with eight team members. Table 1 provides a visual of all data gathered via the grant project as well as the data collected specifically for this study.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher used three subquestions to glean information in order to answer the overarching research question: How did the collaborative practices and processes of school-based leadership teams promote inclusive efforts in schools? More specifically, what initiatives prompted by these teams impacted the perceptions of faculty members of their school and of educating students with disabilities? Insights gathered from the

analyses of data regarding these questions contributed to addressing this issue. (A matrix for research questions by data sources is located in Table 1.) In addition to the interviews and focus groups and all documents and notes relating to the DSLT's work, the co-

Table 1

Matrix of Data by Question

Research Question	Interviews	Focus Groups	Team Self-Evaluations	Climate Survey	Classroom Observation	Archival Data
To what extent did faculty members believe that their school-based leadership team facilitated change which promoted inclusion of students with disabilities?	X	X		X		
How did the leadership team project impact classroom practices?	X	X	X		X	
To what extent did the school-based leadership teams increase opportunities for students with disabilities to be served and participate within the general education setting?	X	X			X	X

Note. Shaded areas represent data gathered via grant project. Non-shaded areas are data specifically gathered to address questions for this study.

directors' activities and reflections, the school teams' activities and evaluations, and the researcher's documentations were included in the narrative to supplement the sources listed in the matrix.

Research subquestion #1 (To what extent did faculty members believe that their school-based leadership team facilitated change that promoted inclusion of students with disabilities?). This question was answered by directly evaluating the perceptions of nineteen non-DSLT faculty members. The researcher conducted focus groups with non-DSLT faculty members at each of the participating schools (see Appendix C for Focus Group Questions). Additional information regarding this question was derived from the results of climate surveys (e.g., school initiated self-surveys, social processes surveys) that assessed faculty perceptions of their particular school and were part of the DSLT project.

Research subquestion #2 (How did the leadership team project impact classroom practices?). Answers came from several sources: focus groups, interviews, team self-evaluations, and classroom observations. As with the focus groups, the individual informal interviews with eight carefully selected DSLT members provided significant information regarding changes in their instruction that related to DSLT activities and events (e.g., professional development activities, school visits). Team self-evaluations and classroom observation notes, which were part of the project's extant data, were collected by the researcher as grant coordinator. The classroom observations were conducted following guidelines in the grant and focused on observations of teacher practices and student engagement in lessons. This information, ascertained from the team

self-evaluations and the classroom observations, was analyzed and incorporated in answering this question.

Research subquestion #3 (To what extent did the school-based leadership teams increase opportunities for students with disabilities to be served and participate within the general education setting?). This question was answered by analyzing the data from the individual and focus group interviews. Data from document analyses of the archival records, an events listing, and direct classroom observations were also incorporated. This information, specifically the classroom observations, allowed the researcher to discern whether classroom practices reflected the professional development activities organized by the DSLTs. Additionally, informal interviews with the eight leadership team members helped to determine if inclusive opportunities for students with disabilities were impacted by the project or other contributing factors (e.g., division mandates, parent/family complaints). These individual interviews allowed the participants to elaborate on the questions, while providing the researcher with time to probe for additional information and ask for added clarification.

Data Analysis

Case studies are intensive, holistic descriptions and analyses of single, bounded units; therefore, conveying an understanding of the cases is the overriding, essential consideration in analyzing the data (Merriam, 1998). For this reason, both cross-case analysis and within-case analysis were conducted (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data collected from individual interviews, field observations, focus groups, and documents for each site were analyzed independently.

Following this within-case analysis, a cross-case analysis for all three schools was performed.

The researcher used the processes of member checking during all stages of data collection (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and triangulation during data analysis to verify accuracy (Creswell, 1998; Janesick, 2000) for the purpose of increasing the internal validity of the study (Janesick, 2000; Merriam, 1998). A final member check verification was sent to the chairpersons of each DSLT and to the assistant moderator of the focus groups (see Appendix D for Member Check Verification Letter).

Qualitative data were systemically analyzed during the study. An events listing (see Appendix E) was developed in order to track the project from its inception to the end of the research period. An events listing is "a matrix that arranges a series of concrete events by chronological time periods, sorting them into several categories" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 111). Data gathered specifically for this research (i.e., informal interviews, focus groups) as well as those collected via the grant project (e.g., archival, observations, team self-evaluations and reflections, social processes results, professional development activity evaluations) were included in this document.

The focus groups were conducted utilizing a structured format based on the works of Morgan and Krueger (1998). A fellow doctoral student with experience in conducting focus group interviews acted as the assistant moderator, responsible for all equipment (e.g., tape recorder, handouts, chart paper), refreshments, the room arrangement, welcoming of participants, and note-taking throughout the discussion (Morgan, 1998). After the focus group and informal interviews, the data were immediately transcribed, the information then chunked and coded manually using highlighters, scissors, glue, index

cards, and a codebook as recommended by Morgan and Krueger (1998), and finally categorized into themes (Krueger, 1998a; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The assistant moderator was asked to provide feedback on the analysis of data in order to maximize the reliability of the information. This process, also called peer-examination, is one of the basic strategies used to enhance the internal validity of a qualitative study (Merriam, 1998).

Prior to conducting the focus groups, the questions were pilot tested in three ways: (a) with other researchers or staff members who were familiar with the program, (b) with potential participants and non-researchers with an informal interview, and (c) with potential participants and non-researchers via email (Krueger, 1998b). The first procedure involved staff members who were familiar with the project and activity – in this case, one of the researcher's fellow doctoral students, one of the co-directors of the DSLT grant project, and a former member of the DSLT project who transferred to another school district. During the piloting process, two aspects were tested at one time: "One is the ease with which the question can be asked, and another is the nature of the answer" (Krueger, 1998b, p. 58). The latter route consisted of eliciting feedback from potential, but non-researcher participants. This was done "by asking questions of individuals who are not familiar with the study but represent lay perspectives ... with people who meet the specifications for being in the focus groups" (p. 58). The researcher sent an email to 41 "like participants" asking them to answer and provide feedback for the five focus group questions. Twenty-eight respondents contributed.

As suggested by Krueger (1998b), the researcher also held informal conversations over coffee with two colleagues who were like the participants – one former general

educator and one special education teacher. According to Krueger, their advice on the questions and logistics, as well as recruitment strategies, was likely to be honest and extremely valuable. Additionally, this process allowed the researcher to become more familiar and comfortable with the content of the questions, thereby improving her ability to ask them with ease. Due to the feedback from this pilot study, two of the five questions were reworded and one was completely recrafted.

All data collected were analyzed using the interactive process of data analysis (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). This process involved analysis at the research site during the collection of data as well as ongoing analysis of data (e.g., before, during, and after actual collection of data). According to Erlandson and colleagues, "The result of this process is the effective collection of rich data that generate alternative hypotheses and provide the basis for shared constructions of reality" (p. 114).

The researcher analyzed the texts (e.g., archival documents, transcribed interviews and focus group questions, events listing, summary of classroom observations) by manually coding and chunking data, and identifying themes (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ryan & Bernard, 2000; Stake, 2000). Coding consisted of "tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56). These codes were attached to words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs called "chunks."

In order to develop themes in texts, word counts and word analysis were utilized (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Word counts consisted of noting the number of times frequently used words appeared in texts and was useful in discovering patterns. While similar to word count, word analysis allowed for constant comparison to similar words or

synonyms and the usage and meanings of those words (pragmatics and semantics). Ryan and Bernard contended that

> This kind of analysis considers neither the contexts in which the words occur nor whether the words are used negatively or positively, but distillations like these can help researchers to identify important constructs and can provide data for systematic comparisons across groups. (p. 777)

Throughout the coding, chunking, and theming process, memoing took place. Memoing consisted of notes to the self by the researcher regarding ephemeral thoughts during the analysis process (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ryan & Bernard, 2000).

Ethical Considerations and Safeguards

In order to obtain permission to conduct the research study within the schools, a letter was sent to the research department or appropriate central office personnel at each school district (see Appendix F). Because this was a grant project originally supported by the central office of each school, the researcher did not anticipate any problems gaining access to the proposed participants. The district superintendent of school A sent an email in support of the study and School B forwarded a formal packet with instructions on how to obtain permission for research in their school, which was completed and permission granted. School C's superintendent expressed concern regarding the change in administration at the school and wanted an in-person interview with the researcher. After the interview, the superintendent emailed a letter to the researcher granting permission to conduct the study.

Additionally, a letter was sent to the DSLT project's funding source representative at the Virginia Department of Education, Office of Special Education

Services, and co-directors of the grant at the College of William and Mary in order to inform them of the research and to elicit their support for the study (see Appendix F). This study proposed to add another layer of evaluation to the DSLT project that was not specified in the grant. Hence, the researcher expected unfettered support and interest from these personnel. The state department of education representative immediately sent a letter of support, while the co-directors at the College of William and Mary provided verbal consent.

Informed consent from participants was sought from the DSLT members who participated in the informal interviews and the non-DSLT faculty members who participated in the focus groups. Informed consent consisted of two components: participants agreed voluntarily to participate and their agreement to participate was based on full and open information (Christians, 2000). The letter to the participants of the focus groups (see Appendix G) outlined the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time from the investigation. This letter also briefly explained the process of the focus group, the participant incentives, and the approximate amount of time involved. Permission to tape record the focus group (see Appendix H) was established just prior to implementation. Because the interviews were conducted with existing DSLT members and were informal by nature, formal letters for participation were not needed; however, permission to tape record and use the responses in this study was gained prior to the actual interviews (see Appendix H).

The risk-benefit ratio leaned heavily on the side of benefit for this research study. Codes of ethics insist on safeguards to protect the identities of participants and the location of the research (Christians, 2000). Confidentiality and privacy was maintained

by concealing all personal data and only making them public "behind a shield of anonymity" (p. 139). The only risk identified was the possibility of members from the focus groups divulging information others in the group shared with the researcher. The benefits to the target audience were substantial. This study advances literature for policy, research, and practice in the areas of leadership, school reform, and special education, far outweighing the risks. Identifying the perceptions of the non-team faculty members on the inclusive efforts of their school-based leadership teams led to an understanding of how to better address school reform issues and embrace the process of teaming or shared leadership; therefore, by empowering teachers as leaders, environments conducive to learning for all students can be created.

CHAPTER IV – Three Cases

This chapter provides narrative descriptions of each of the three schools participating in this multiple-case study. The depictions are presented in order to provide additional information about the context of the study and the school-based leadership teams. Each case description provides a brief portrayal of the community as well as a description of the school district, school, school climate results, and finally the leadership team. Furthermore, the researcher presents a snapshot view of each team's action plan while emphasizing the role of the DSLT in fostering more inclusive environments. Pseudonyms School A, School B, and School C are used to refer to the sites. All data were ascertained via the individual schools, project reports and records, and researcher observations.

In order to evaluate school climate for the grant project, three instruments were integrated into one survey assessing the social processes (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Goddard et al., 2000; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). These indicators were extracted and analyzed separately. The first of three climate surveys was conducted at the initial visits to all three schools and was intended to reveal baseline data for each school. This survey was designed to capture the collective perceptions of faculty members of the educational environment of their school. Thus, essentially, the climate survey results were an expression of the attitude of the school as reflected by its members. The survey

was conducted on two subsequent occasions during the research study. (See Appendix I for Charts of Climate Results by School.)

School A

The district in which School A was located consisted of five schools: a primary, an elementary, a middle school, the high school, and an alternative school. The primary school housed kindergarten through fourth graders, while fifth and sixth graders attended the elementary school. The middle school accommodated students in grades seven through eight and the high school was a traditional ninth- to twelfth-grade facility. Approximately 2,700 students attended the schools in pre-kindergarten through grade 12. School A was set in a large southeast Virginia rural county. The population of the county was approximately 11,600 people. Nearly 60 percent of the county's population was African-American while another 1 percent of the citizens were from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds: Native American, Asian, Hispanic, and those categorized as multi-racial.

Description of School

The elementary school was School A. It was located at the end of a long, tree-lined drive next to a major interstate in what the researcher considered a very rustic, desolated area. This small, older building had several mobile classrooms on two sides. These temporary classrooms had been fixtures at the school for several years, as evidenced by the covered walkways that connected them to the main building. The inside of the building consisted of two perpendicular hallways extending from the entrance with classrooms on either side. The walls in the halls were covered with student art work, writings, and worksheets. The building was well maintained, but dark and dusty. There

was no gymnasium in the school, but it did have a small library in one hall and a cafeteria located directly across from the office.

Upon the researcher's first visit to the building, the administrators and office staff were extremely welcoming and friendly. During class changes, a low chatter of student voices and rustling of footsteps echoed through the corridors as students moved from one room to the next in single-file lines with their hands behind their backs. When questioned about this procedure, the principal stated, "It's a carryover from the primary school." She added that this practice reduced the number of students touching each other and in essence decreased the number of fights and other physical disturbances. The principal was able to address students by name as they acknowledged her presence.

At the initial visit to the school, the researcher along with one of the co-directors of the grant had the pleasure of dialoguing with the principal. She seemed very open, receptive, and excited about the opportunity to work with the DSLT project. Her first words of warning were that the district did not like the term *inclusion*. She shared that the term was nearly forbidden in conversations and had a negative connotation in the eyes of the district's central administration.

Approximately 35 teachers delivered instruction to the nearly 425 fifth and sixth graders who attended the school. Almost 60 percent of the student body received free or reduced-cost lunches during the time of the study. The special education population consisted of nearly 70 students with identified disabilities. The categories of the special education population included mainly students with learning disabilities and mild to moderate mental retardation, with 23 and 29 students, respectively. School A also provided services for students with other disabilities, including three students with speech

and language impairments, five with other health impairments, and seven students with emotional disturbances.

For the duration of the DSLT project, School A was not fully accredited by the state. Accreditation is based on 70 percent of students passing the state standardized tests in English, science, mathematics, and history. The school was rated as provisionally accredited/needs improvement. Schools received this rating if their pass rates in one or more of the four core subject areas (i.e., English, mathematics, history, science) were less than 70 percent based on the current year's scores or an average of achievement during the three most recent years but above the subject area benchmarks established by the state (see Table 2). With just under 41 percent passing in during the 2000-2001 school year, School A was well under the state's 65 percent benchmark. Although students did show improvement in mathematics in the second year of the study, it was not enough to remove the school's "needs improvement" rating.

Table 2

School A Pass Rates for State Test

Subject Area	Benchmarks	2000-2001	2001-2002
English	66%	52.80%	48.90%
Mathematics	65%	40.74%	42.78%
History	50%	53.33%	68.54%
Science	66%	59.53%	63.04%

Note. State standard is 70% in each subject area; however, benchmarks were established for schools not meeting this standard.

Climate Survey Results

The school climate survey was conducted three times in the course of the grant. The first took place at the initial visit to the school in May 2001. The second and third surveys were conducted during the subsequent school years in March and February, respectively. (See Appendix I for Charts of Climate Results by school.) One area assessed was that of faculty trust (i.e., teacher trust in principal, teacher trust in colleagues, teacher trust in students and parents). Trust was defined as one party's willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is reliable, competent, honest, and open (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). School A's faculty perceptions in all three aspects of teacher trust increased by more than one full standard deviation in the first year. Over the second year of the project, the teacher trust in the principal continued to show an increase; however, trust in colleagues dropped slightly. Trust in students and parents also decreased, nearly returning to the initial baseline score.

Virtually all areas of climate at School A either maintained or improved over the course of the two-year study. Academic press, or the extent to which the school was driven by a quest for excellence, dropped slightly over the first year of the project, but increased the following year by more than 60 points (over half a standard deviation). The specific dimensions of climate considered noteworthy included teacher professionalism and collective efficacy. According to DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2001), teachers' perceived respect of the professional expertise of colleagues is the basis for teacher professionalism. Moreover, collective efficacy is defined as an assessment of the collective perceptions or beliefs in the school's capacity to achieve meaningful student learning and discipline (Goddard et al., 2000).

In the first year of the DSLT project, both teacher professionalism and collective efficacy at School A also showed an increase of one standard deviation or 100 points. Consequently, teacher perceptions in both of these areas fell between the second and third survey assessments. The results of the first survey were taken in consideration by the DSLT members when collecting data to incorporate their DSLT action plans. The following two survey results were used in developing the action steps designed to assist in meeting their goals.

Description of DSLT

Fourteen teachers submitted applications of interest to the principal. From that pool, the principal and core DSLT staff from the College selected 10 members based on the criteria identified in Chapter I of this study. The principal and assistant principal were part of the 10 member DSLT. Additionally, four special education teachers and four general education teachers participated. The second year brought a few changes in the composition of the team due to teachers leaving the school for various reasons. Two special education members were lost, but replaced subsequently with other faculty. The new team consisted of 11 members – eight of the original and three new members who were veteran general educators at the school.

During the first year of the DSLT project, School A's leadership team reported that they experienced some separation and divergence from the rest of the faculty and staff. They felt as if the team members were viewed by other teachers as the "secret society" or an elite group of teachers "taking the side of administrators," as one member stated. They reported to the co-directors and grant coordinator during a DSLT bi-monthly

meeting that some of the non-team teachers avoided them and no longer conversed with them about school issues.

In an attempt to overcome this stigma, the team utilized faculty meetings to communicate the purpose of DSLT and the benefits of the action plan they developed. Additionally, they invited non-team members to participate in workshops and arranged for full-faculty professional development opportunities. DSLT members also presented their action plan to their local school board during a regularly scheduled school board meeting.

Based on the climate surveys and the team members' knowledge of the school, faculty, and students, the following goals were established for the duration of the grant project: (a) The faculty will establish a more trusting relationship between staff and parents; (b) The faculty will establish a professional relationship with staff and administrators; and (c) The faculty will prepare students with disabilities and low-achieving students for academic success.

The team proposed to accomplish these goals by implementing a number of activities throughout the two-year period. During the first year the following activities were incorporated for the purpose of reaching goals 1 and 2: establishing a professional book club and library for teachers; using peer coaching by subject areas and across grade levels; and publishing daily memos for teachers in order to share happenings, events, and student information (e.g., suspensions) with the entire staff. Activities for goal 3 aimed at modifying study guides for state standard objectives to include visual representations of information for students. Additionally, the team wanted to encourage teachers to incorporate a variety of instructional strategies in order to meet the needs of all learners.

Teachers were afforded the opportunity to participate in and attend various workshops, conferences, and symposia within and outside the school.

The Team's Role in Fostering Inclusive Practices

In order to prepare for the changes proposed by the DSLT members and to encourage support from the central office, School A's principal invited the project coordinator to present on collaboration and inclusion at the annual summer retreat. The three-hour presentation focused on the role that collaboration plays in effective inclusive education. Several hands-on and reflection activities were incorporated into the workshop in order to model how students with varying abilities and background knowledge benefited from working in heterogeneous environments. Implementation tips were also offered.

The superintendent conveyed in an email message to the researcher that he and the principals believed that the workshop was beneficial and agreed with School A's principal on the importance of sharing this information. They invited the coordinator to share the information with the teaching staff at the middle school and primary school. Additionally, the DSLT members asked that the workshop be offered to their faculty during the opening week of school to better prepare them for implementation of inclusion.

In May 2001, at the onset of the DSLT project, the majority of the students receiving special education services at School A participated in self-contained settings. At that time, inclusive opportunities were mainly limited to physical education, art, and music. During the first year of the grant project, five general education classrooms

opened their doors to inclusion, three voluntarily. For the 2002-2003 school year, this number increased to 13 general education teachers participating in inclusive education.

The team arranged for several groups of teachers – both members and non-members – to visit schools that had been implementing inclusive education for several years. School A teachers were able to talk with the faculty members candidly about the ups and downs of implementing inclusion. When these teachers returned from their visits, the team arranged a meeting for the entire faculty to be involved in small-group discussions assessing the possible benefits and challenges to implementing more inclusive practices at School A.

Summary

This small school moved from being a setting where the use of the term *inclusion* was discouraged to becoming an organization that implemented it. The team arranged for visits to other schools to assist with implementation and to help get other faculty members to "buy in" to the idea. They offered voluntary professional development activities focusing on a variety of topics (e.g., cooperative learning groups, behavior management and discipline, active learning strategies). The team also worked on improving the professional atmosphere by providing refreshments at meetings and dinner workshops outside of the school building. Their overall goal was to help their school become a positive environment for teachers and students alike.

School B

There were 19 schools in School B's district: 12 traditional elementary schools with grades pre-kindergarten through fifth, four middle schools for students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, two ninth-to-twelfth high schools, and one alternative school.

The total district student population for grades pre-kindergarten through 12 was nearly 12,000. School B was located in a large city on the outskirts of a metropolitan area in southeastern Virginia. It was approximately 430 square miles with just over 63,600 residents. Forty-four percent of the city's population was African-American while seven percent were from culturally diverse backgrounds (e.g., multi-racial, Hispanic, Asian, Native American).

Description of School

School B was one of the four middle schools. This former high school was a large, older building set back from a main road directly adjacent to a police sub-station. The main doors led directly to the office, which was typically busy with a lot of foot traffic – both adults and students. The researcher found the school floor plan very confusing and on several occasions found herself lost, especially in the midst of class changes when teachers dismissed the middle schoolers to travel to their next class. One noticeable element of the school was its cleanliness. The floors of the hallways, corridors, and restrooms were free of litter and very shiny, as if they were freshly waxed. The custodians were visible, friendly, and appeared to be proud of their undertakings.

Everyone encountered was friendly and offered their respective hellos, yet expressed caution with "strangers" in their environment. On many occasions, despite the visitor's badge, the researcher was stopped with "How are you?" followed by a quick, "What room [or who] are you looking for?" The faculty and staff as a whole were pleasant.

Prior to introducing the grant project to the School B faculty and staff, the co-directors and coordinator had a conference with the principal. Very business-like, she

praised her staff and their efforts in educating the many diverse and needy students in their school. She seemed reluctant to share any weaknesses with the grant staff. During the faculty meeting immediately following this conference, the information for the DSLT project was distributed and the climate survey distributed.

Approximately 60 teachers made up the faculty at this middle school. Of the nearly 750 students, more than half received free or reduced-cost lunches. Over 85 students received special education services. The special education population consisted primarily of 71 students with learning disabilities, mental retardation, and other health impairments. Special education teachers also provided services to 11 students with emotional disturbances, three with hearing impairments, and two students with speech and language impairments.

During the first year of DSLT, the state rated School B as provisionally accredited/needs improvement based on the passing scores of the state standardized test. As mentioned, schools in Virginia with pass rates below 70 percent are provisionally accredited if their scores are at or above the state established benchmark scores (see Table 3). School B was deficient history, with just over 32 percent of their students passing; however, the school's average pass rate for the three most recent years allowed it to maintain the "needs improvement" status. This school demonstrated improvement in the student pass rate the next year. It was able to meet or exceed the benchmarks set by the state in all four subject areas and its rating increased to provisionally accredited/meets state standards.

Table 3

School B Pass Rates for State Test

Subject Area	Benchmarks	2000-2001	2001-2002
English	66%	50.00%	63.13%
Mathematics	65%	47.26%	56.97%
History	50%	32.06%	54.55%
Science	66%	70.09%	73.96%

Note. State standard is 70% in each subject area; however, benchmarks were established for schools not meeting this standard.

Climate Survey Results

The results of the first survey, although only intended as baseline data, surprised some of the DSLT members at School B, particularly the principal. When the results were shared at the initial summer workshop, she left the meeting and did not return to the following day's training session. In a later telephone conversation with one of the co-directors of the grant, the principal admitted that she was embarrassed by the results (see Appendix I for Charts of Climate Survey Results). The indicator for trust, specifically teacher trust in principal, was nearly two and a half standard deviations below the mean score of 500. The second survey revealed a 93-point increase in that area of trust and the third continued to show improvement.

As with School A, School B increased in nearly every dimension of school climate between the first and second survey. In the area of teacher trust in colleagues, however, the perceptions of the faculty fell by 40 points the first year, but then peaked the third year by nearly two and a half standard deviations. Conversely, collegial leadership,

characterized by a principal who is considerate, helpful, and concerned about the welfare of the teachers (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2001), and teacher professionalism both showed a considerable gain of more than two standard deviations over the first year. However, according to the third climate survey both results dropped slightly the second year. Generally, based on the results of the gathered data, the collective faculty's perceptions of climate at School B improved in a relatively short period of time. These results, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the school as perceived by the team members, were used in developing their 2001-2003 DSLT action plan.

Description of DSLT

Only five teachers expressed interest in joining the DSLT project initially. All of them met the DSLT requirements and were accepted to the team. They were encouraged to recruit other teachers to join as well. At the first summer workshop, only four teachers and three administrators were present. The co-directors informed them that more teachers were needed on the team if they wanted to continue with the project. By the researcher's first official visit in September 2001, a team of 11 members was in place: six general education teachers, two special educators, two assistant principals, and the principal. One assistant principal was promoted to principal at another middle school within the district the second year of the project leaving the team intact but with one less member for the following year.

As a group, the leadership team brainstormed ideas for goals that would benefit their school. They focused on three main areas: (a) The faculty and staff will improve communication skills by promoting collaboration and teamwork; (b) The faculty and staff will increase instructional practices to enhance positive teaching experiences and to

ensure academic success for all students; and (c) The faculty and staff will implement activities and monitor behavioral progress of students to facilitate learning.

Although their first goal pertained primarily to building a supportive environment, School B's goals were more focused on student learning and behavior management than the other two schools in the study. This team elicited the faculty and staff's input prior to establishing the activities and strategies for meeting these goals. The team distributed self-made questionnaires to the teachers, compiled the results, and shared the information during regular faculty meetings. The team then facilitated discussions with small groups of teachers. Although this took much time to coordinate, they were satisfied with their efforts. The chairperson of the team claimed, "We weren't comfortable making decisions that affected the whole school."

The activities implemented by School B's team included staff socials and get-togethers, school beautification projects (e.g., cleaning the grounds, planting flowers), and a tailgate party prior to a school basketball game. They strived to reduce unfavorable behaviors during class changes by implementing an "Adopt a Hallway" program. Each grade level decorated its corridor with student-created projects and professionally made banners. The purpose of this activity was to develop pride in the school and showcase student achievements.

As a whole, this team reportedly worked well together. However, some participants were deemed "ghost members" by their fellow teammates because they "were only interested in the [incentives]." The major challenge this team experienced was similar to that of School A. All the members of the team were already "leaders" within the school. They were department, grade level, and subject area chairpersons or

administrators. Several of them were official holders of two-way radios with a direct connection to the office. Therefore, the team was perceived by non-team members as an extension of the administration staff.

In an attempt to overcome this stigma, the team made regular visits to grade level and content area meetings to share their efforts with the rest of the staff. Allegedly, they also invited other teachers to join the team, although no new members were added. School B's leadership team held open meetings where anyone from the staff was welcome to participate.

The Team's Role in Fostering Inclusive Practices

Of the three schools in this study, at the onset of the DSLT project, School B was further along in the inclusive process than the other two schools. In the past, they had elicited long-term assistance from a state-supported special education training facility. The district's special education department also had specialists specifically for inclusion. According to one special education team member, these other resources were "definitely helpful, but we need a little more."

At the beginning of the DSLT project, seven general education teachers worked with special educators on a regular basis in an inclusive environment. During the 2001-2002 school year, this number increased to 12 general educators and in the final year of the project 24 teachers from the general curriculum participated in inclusion.

Like School A's district's aversion to the term *inclusion*, School B's district disliked the term *co-teaching*. According to one special education teacher, *collaborative teaching* – which was preferred – was a more appropriate definition of their position in the general education classroom. Due to the number of students requiring these services,

the special educators were not able to be in the general education classrooms on a full-time basis, so *co-teaching* could not always take place.

Instruction was a concern raised by the team. Meeting the needs of the wide range of abilities in these classrooms was their focus. For example, they arranged for the grant coordinator and a special education consultant to provide professional development on the topic of "Meeting the Diverse Needs of Students in the General Education Setting." The presenters modeled four variations of co-teaching while providing examples of process and content modifications that could be used in the classroom. Additionally, the interactive presentation allowed for teachers to see that accommodations made for students with disabilities also could be used for other low achieving students.

The team members attended several conferences and workshops supported by the DSLT. They also arranged for site visits to other middle schools in other districts that had demonstrated success with the inclusion process. Lastly, the team held a voluntary Saturday workshop with breakfast, lunch, and a stipend for teachers attending. This workshop focused on teaching culturally diverse populations and managing behavior and discipline in the inclusive setting.

Summary

Although this school was ahead of the others as far as inclusion of students with disabilities was concerned, it did have its share of challenges. The school increased the number of classrooms participating in inclusion and co-teaching. The team encouraged teachers to volunteer for additional training in instructional practices by raising their awareness of conferences and workshops sponsored by agencies outside their school

district. The team itself maintained a cohesive relationship throughout the duration of the project.

School C

School C was located in a small southeastern Virginia city. Over 3,100 families called this 20-square kilometer city their home. Of the city's more than 8,300 residents, the minority population consisted of 55 percent African-Americans, while less than two and a half percent of their citizenry were of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. This district had three school buildings that accommodated the 1,450 members of their school-age population. The elementary school housed the kindergarten through third grade students. The fourth through seventh graders attended the middle school. Finally, in addition to the ninth through twelfth graders, eighth-grade students also attended the high school.

Description of School

The middle school was School C. The building was a structure built in the early 1980s and set at the edge of an established neighborhood with newly built homes on the opposite side. The office of the school was directly inside the main entrance. The school was set up in pods with restrooms in the center of four connected classrooms. All of the hallways had their own color to distinguish them from the others. The library was a centerpiece of the school. It was a large, round two-story carpeted room with attractive wooden bookshelves and several rectangular tables with chairs.

On several occasions when entering the building, the researcher felt less than welcomed by the office staff. The faculty members encountered throughout the rest of the building were friendlier; however, they tended to keep to themselves. During the initial

interview with the principal prior to introducing the project to the faculty, she shared with the grant core staff that she had major concerns regarding the "invisible wall" that separated the general education and special education staff. She added that if inclusion was going to work at School C, the district had to cease viewing them as separate entities or disciplines. Additionally, she mentioned that another challenge they would have to overcome was all the initiatives and programs, in addition to DSLT, that were already implemented at the school. She did not want the faculty to become overwhelmed.

The faculty at School C consisted of 41 teachers. Nearly 70 percent of the approximately 460 students participated in the free and reduced-cost lunch program. The special education population consisted of approximately 110 students. Students with disabilities at School C were served under several disability categories: 58 were students identified with learning disabilities, 27 had speech and language disorders, 19 were categorized with other health impairments, 14 had mental retardation, and one student had emotional disturbance.

Like the other two schools, at the genesis of this project school C was rated provisionally accredited/needs improvement based on the state standardized test (see Table 4). During the second year of the study scores in science dropped more than 20 points below the benchmarks set by the state, so the school's rating changed to accredited with warning. Like the other 5 percent of Virginia's schools with this rating, School C was closely monitored by the state and had to undergo academic review and adopt an improvement plan.

Table 4

School C Pass Rates for State Test

Subject Area	Benchmarks	2000-2001	2001-2002
English	66%	57.95%	54.72%
Mathematics	65%	61.11%	43.40%
History	50%	40.57%	49.57%
Science	66%	55.56%	44.43%

Note. State standard is 70% in each subject area; however, benchmarks were established for schools not meeting this standard.

Climate Survey Results

The initial climate survey was conducted during the first visit to the school when the project was introduced to the faculty. When compared to the subsequent surveys, School C's faculty perceptions of teacher trust in principal and teacher trust in colleagues remained virtually unchanged (see Appendix I for Charts of Climate Survey Results). Teacher trust in students and parents started low and only fluctuated slightly. Unfortunately, during the course of the project, between the first implementation of the survey and the second, the faculty's perception of their climate fell in all dimensions. The largest drop occurred in teacher professionalism, decreasing by more than 200 points or almost two and a half standard deviations. Consequently, the third survey results showed improvement in the collective perceptions of faculty members for three of the five dimensions.

With the exception of organizational citizenship and teacher trust in colleagues, which soared almost two full standard deviations, scores in all other areas of climate were just under the baseline data collected from the first survey. Only organizational

citizenship, characterized by teachers going above and beyond their minimum contractual duties in order to facilitate a smoothly operating organization (DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran 2001), showed a steady increase over the full two-year period of the study. The team used the baseline data of the survey as the primary bases for developing their two-year action plan.

Description of DSLT

Of the three schools, School C's leadership team experienced the most overall challenges in their "teaming" process. First, they were unable to recruit any special education teachers to participate on the team during the first year. According to the principal, this was an extension of a districtwide conflict separating the two disciplines. She anticipated a positive change regarding communication with and operations of special education due to proposed changes in the district-level special education administration.

Another challenge experienced by the team was what they perceived as a confidentiality issue. The DSLT members of this school agreed that their brainstorming exercises during decision-making and problem-solving would not be disclosed until an agreed-upon time. This agreement was breached by one member and temporarily broke down the team by making them lose the trust they had built. The remaining team members felt that this person's presence on the team did not benefit the goals of DSLT or the school and consequently encouraged the person to step down from the team.

On the rebound of this trust issue at the end of the first year of the project, the team and other staff members were informed that the administration was going to change. Both the principal and the assistant principal were being reassigned to other positions

within the district. The team expressed concern for the continuation of the DSLT project. The co-directors assured them that the opportunity to continue with new administration would remain.

At the onset of the project, School C had 10 faculty members on its DSLT – nine general education teachers and the principal. As previously stated, the principal was promoted the second year, prompting a change in administration as well as a change in the composition of the leadership team. Additionally, one teacher member left the school thereby creating another empty position on the team. Because there were no special educators on the original team, the team was urged by the grant staff to recruit at least one special education teacher to fill the void. The new principal, one special education teacher, and two additional general educators joined the DSLT for the second year of the project. Thus, the reconfigured leadership team consisted of 12 members.

With the new administration also came another challenge. The team members were not permitted to do any planning and were prohibited from attending DSLT functions without the principal being present. Unaware of the purpose of the team, the principal wanted to be present during planning sessions to provide input and align her goals with the goals of the team. The team, on the other hand, felt as if their efforts at making their school a better environment for all constituents were being pushed to the background.

The grant staff arranged a meeting with the principal after the fact to explain the purpose of the grant project and the leadership team. After this meeting, the new principal seemed extremely open to the project and supported the team in continuing its endeavors. With a late start in the second year, School C's leadership team, with the backing of the

new principal, updated the action plan activities. The goals of the plan consisted of the following:

The team will:

1. promote trust among our staff members,
2. enhance the public image of our school/staff,
3. meet or exceed the 70 percent benchmark for passing the state tests,
4. increase positive behavior, decrease negativity, and
5. promote and recognize student academics/behaviors.

The strategies implemented in an effort to reach these goals included many social activities. The team began by acknowledging staff members with a birthday club and by highlighting a "teacher of the month" program. They turned a mandatory faculty meeting into an ice cream social and hosted potluck lunches on early-release days. Additionally, the team coordinated and funded an appreciation breakfast for the teachers, custodians, other staff members, and bus drivers on a teacher work day.

The team also proposed in the action plan to submit written articles for publication to the local newspaper in order to highlight the positive aspects of the school. They also incorporated parent night out and family reading night. They invited community members to volunteer at the school for special events and one-on-one tutoring of students. These were all strategies intended to enhance their public image.

The Team's Role in Fostering Inclusive Practices

Although this team's main focus was on facilitating a positive school image and creating a more pleasant school environment, their underlying purpose was to create an atmosphere conducive to effective inclusion. Prior to implementation of DSLT, the

students with disabilities at School C were limited primarily to self-contained settings. However, these students were mainstreamed into non-academic subject areas, such as physical education. During the first year of the project, the special education students only had access to informal inclusive opportunities. That is, some of the general education teachers "allowed" the special education teachers to bring their students into the regular classes once in a while, but only for special activities such as a science lab.

Between the first and second year of the grant project, the change of administration also brought about major changes in the organization of the school. The teachers no longer were organized in grade level teams, but by subject area. Additionally, the school's mild to moderate special education population was fully included in the general education population. The teachers were surprised at the drastic change. One team member stated, "We had no say so in the decision. When we returned, it was done." Although this was where the team ultimately saw the school headed, they did not anticipate it happening so quickly. During the second year, each grade level had one team of two general education teachers (eight teachers) working with special education teachers and students within their classrooms.

Some activities implemented by the team to assist with this transition included sending team members to various workshops and conferences. Additionally, they provided dinner and a stipend to the teachers who voluntarily attended a three-hour inclusion workshop held after school in the library. As a follow-up to this presentation, the team funded two independent special education consultants to conduct eight days of observations (two visits at each grade level) and provide feedback and recommendations to better meet the needs of all students within the co-teaching settings. Lastly, the team

arranged for two groups of teachers to visit and observe classrooms of schools where successful inclusive practices were taking place. Following these observations, the visiting teachers held small-group discussions with other teachers during a regularly scheduled faculty meeting.

Summary

School C experienced many challenges in the duration of this study, but the team adapted to these changes and continued to promote its efforts to the rest of the school. Although the increase in inclusive opportunities at School C, like the other two schools, cannot be attributed directly to the work of the DSLT, the team members took advantage of the situation and provided professional development opportunities. They never gave up on their quest to build a more positive school environment.

Summary of Three Case Studies

For the most part, these schools operated from a top-down, centralization mode. Their efforts were primarily reactive, in that they responded to mandates handed to them from the powers above (e.g., central office, state directives, federal mandates). In the project's initial assessment, the researcher and co-directors found that participating teachers and staff members rarely, if ever, had a voice in the changes they were expected to make within their schools and classrooms. Districtwide inservices focused on training the masses, as opposed to addressing individual needs of teachers, was the norm. The school districts typically arranged professional development workshops on one topic and required all faculty and staff members to participate. As a result, teachers seldom applied these one-shot, general workshop techniques to their own environments.

The individual school teams began actively assessing their faculty needs in order to determine the types of training and professional development they wanted and needed. More individual team members openly evaluated their own teaching techniques and made changes in their classroom instruction. Instead of accepting districtwide workshops, the teams requested inservices designed to meet the needs of their particular school and faculty. Their requests were backed by "ammunition" of data gathered from their fellow staff members. Two teams presented their DSLT action plans at school board meetings in order to highlight the importance of their efforts.

The researcher, as project coordinator, visited each of the three schools and observed classrooms at least once a month over the two-year period. She recognized immediately that paper-pencil activities for students with lecturing from the teachers were the norm. Although several teachers actively involved students in high-interest lessons, many teachers did not utilize active learning strategies, group work, or hands-on activities. Instead, they were focused on teaching the state standardized learning objectives and emphasizing the importance of these tests the students.

At the first all DSLT project dinner meeting in November 2001, one of the segments was devoted to teaching strategies that could be useful across disciplines. Following this session, one team called upon the project coordinator to conduct a workshop for their faculty on cooperative learning, whereas the other two schools presented the strategies during their regularly scheduled faculty meetings. On subsequent visits to the schools, some evidence of practicing these strategies was observed; however, with the little time that the researcher spent in the classrooms, it was difficult to get a true sense of the number of teachers implementing the various strategies. On few occasions,

DSLT members called the researcher into their rooms so she could see their students "in action." Many teachers were readily able to adapt and modify the activities to meet the needs of their students and their own styles of teaching.

DSLT project dinner meetings were utilized as training and update sessions. The teams participated in teambuilding and teaming activities and shared their progress with the other teams. Consultants with backgrounds in special education and leadership were invited to present on these topics. The three leadership teams were able to view the ups and downs of teaming while dialoguing about possible ways to improve their own situations. The professional conversations and discussions between the three teams allowed all members to develop a larger professional network.

CHAPTER V – Data Analysis

According to emerging evidence, school-based leadership teams must provide collaborative leadership for development, management, and monitoring of their plans to incorporate inclusive education (Pugach & Johnson, 1995; Turnbull et al., 1999). Identifying the attributes of these teams will provide other schools with the knowledge to enhance their inclusive efforts. The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of collaborative teams on inclusive efforts in schools through observing, describing, and analyzing the development of three school-based leadership teams in their quest to build more inclusive environments within their schools.

By reviewing and analyzing the data sources listed in Chapter III of this study, the researcher summarized the results of the DSLT project as described by the teams, individual team members, and other non-team faculty members. The data sources were examined and analyzed by site, and then across the three settings in order to identify major themes. In the previous chapter, the researcher provided a narrative description of the three cases by offering overviews and contexts of each of the three settings. This chapter identifies the major themes that emerged as a result of the cross-case analyses. Table 5 offers insight into the themes by extracting some of the data via each school setting.

This portion of the study integrated data collected from the three school settings. Leadership team members contributed to team self-evaluations, and some participated in

interviews while non-team faculty members volunteered for the focus groups held at each of the three school sites. The researcher included data from several observations and site visits throughout the two years of the grant project. In addition, review of various documents, such as each school's action plan, end of the year reports, and minutes from meetings, provided useful insights into the team processes.

Six qualitative methods of inquiry, previously described in Chapter III were used to collect data: (a) focus groups, (b) interviews, (c) team self-evaluations, (d) document reviews, (e) classroom observations, and (f) climate surveys results. An interactive process of data analysis (Erlandson et al., 1993) was used to review, code, and categorize data from interviews, observations, and focus groups. Data from the document reviews and team evaluations were analyzed by coding and chunking data, identifying themes, and utilizing a memoing process (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ryan & Bernard, 2000; Stake, 2000). Finally, the climate surveys were analyzed using quantitative methods and their results included in a narrative format in the previous chapter. Themes that emerged from the data are presented in the next section.

Emerging Themes

In order to capture the voices of the participants, data from the focus groups, interviews, team evaluations, and climate surveys were used in the cross-case analyses. Data from all three schools revealed several patterns that fell into four major themes: teacher empowerment, supportive environment (with a focus on communication and trust), collaboration, and resources (i.e., knowledge, time). Additionally, data from

Table 5

Data for Themes by School

Themes	School A	School B	School C
Teacher Empowerment	"[the team members] are our liaison between the staff and the administration" "they're our voice for this whole inclusion process" "they validated some of our concerns"	"we had to take weak areas and come up with ways to address [them]" "we actually have a sounding board" "... we can fix ourselves"	"we as teachers can change our school in a positive way instead of all changes coming from central office"
Supportive Environment			
Communication	" when they talked , it lets me know that I'm not the only one that feels a certain way" "communication among staff on all issues"	"easier to communicate with administrators" "very inconsistent communication" "to be honest, we don't know what [the team members] are doing"	"no consistent communication ... few staff understand the purpose of DSLT" "we're not privy to what's happening in those meetings"
Trust	"I think we have trust amongst each other" "we're a more cohesive faculty"	"one staff member appears to undermine what we are trying to do"	"[the team] should be here for the children, not the recognition"

Table 5

Data for Themes by School, continued

Themes	School A	School B	School C
Collaboration	"feedback from others allowed me to see I wasn't the only one feeling that way" "working with people who shared common goals with me"	"... the school staff is working in unison to accomplish like goals" "teachers are collaborating in class as well as planning and sharing lessons"	"[we came] together to discuss problems and brainstorming ways to solve them" "working together actually pays off"
Resources			
Knowledge	"I'd like to see [inclusion] classes actually set up here ... role model classes "we need more training ... regular teachers just don't know how to explain stuff to the kids"	"we just don't know clearly why [the team is] here or what the goal is" "I really feel that the workshops and inservices will help foster [inclusion]"	"we began some much needed training ... we're talking about [inclusion] and how to make it better, whereas before we were only complaining about it" "build morale"
Time	"time is an issue...planning, pull-out for resources needed" "less other things to do ... too many other meetings also"	"find[ing] the time to incorporate new ideas, and also get everything completed ... and stay on pace with the curriculum guide"	"more time to work toward the change" "time for the process" "time to get back on track"

the document review, specifically the events listing and team action plans, were incorporated in order to provide insight into these themes.

Teacher Empowerment

Leaders who have the ability to anticipate the needs of an organization – including its members – communicate those needs, and inspire and guide others to act on those needs toward a moral and ethical purpose are identified as transformational leaders (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). According to Kouzes and Posner, transformational leadership describes how power can assist others in becoming successful and in accomplishing their goals. When self-esteem is enhanced and individuals feel respected and valued, they can exceed expectations.

The DSLT members at all three schools volunteered because they felt the work was significant and could provide them with a sense of accomplishment. Consistent with Katzenbach and Smith (1993), the team members developed a shared understanding of empowerment and realized the importance of assuming responsibility for the decisions that they make. When school administrators sought out, stimulated, and celebrated a team's work, the teachers were more apt to work diligently and persistently to become successful. Both members and non-members cited a sense of empowerment as a major accomplishment of the project.

Teacher empowerment is related to teachers' sense of efficacy. When compared to the baseline results of the climate survey, the collective efficacy dimension increased at all three schools over the course of the two-year project. According to Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001), this sense of efficacy is linked to teacher persistence

and commitment. Empowered teachers are committed and take responsibility for identifying and solving problems within their schools.

"We as teachers can change our school in a positive way instead of all changes coming from the central office." Non-team members, as well as the DSLT members alluded to empowerment as essential for making changes in schools. While the team members focused on what they did as a small group of teachers, non-team members centered on their own indirect contributions, "I remember at one point, [the team] showed us the results of a survey and we had to take the weak areas and come up with plans to address those weak areas." Another DSLT member stated that the project itself "promoted professionalism" because it gave "the teachers a chance to be a part of the leadership of the school ... and take responsibility." One non-member noted during a focus group interview that the team members "are the liaison between the staff and the administration ... I feel like they are our voice in this whole inclusion process."

The administrators supported the project's underlying premise of promoting empowerment by giving teachers opportunities and tools for decision-making. Topics such as organizational change, planning and problem-solving strategies, and project performance evaluations prepared teams for work back at their schools. In addition, the grant core staff from the College, independent consultants, and external facilitators for the grant provided training and work sessions on participatory decision making and writing performance stories. This information assisted the teams' progress in meeting, monitoring, and evaluating their DSLT action plan goals. Another empowering component discussed throughout the two years was the importance of communication

and of sharing as much information as possible while engaging other staff members in the process.

Opportunities for leadership must be stimulated, sought out, and celebrated. "The moment of greatest learning for any of us is when we find ourselves responsible for a problem that we care desperately to resolve" (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996, p. 136). Sharing leadership and promoting professional development is deeper and more complex than is often assumed. By having a hand in developing a plan, teachers were more eager to put out the extra effort to be part of the process (Wilson & Corbett, 1991). Leadership must be viewed in a variety of forms and on different levels if it is to be spread across faculty. Moran and colleagues (1996) reported that leaders must model how to participate in meetings, utilize decision-making skills, and solve problems efficiently and effectively.

Supportive Environment

The second theme to emerge dealt with the professional working environments of the schools. In order to promote supportive environments, the project, schools, and teams needed to address a variety of issues and concerns, establish communication networks, provide opportunities for reflection and feedback, arrange time and other resources necessary for collaboration, and create structures involving teachers in decision making (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Both words and actions are necessary to overcome barriers and create capacity for change. In their action plans, all three school leadership teams incorporated at least one goal that emphasized promoting a positive work environment. As one team member stated, "A more positive work environment makes students happy, too." The faculty and staff at these schools suggested that improvements in overall

communication and building trusting relationships were important in promoting supportive environments.

Communication. A recurring theme in the literature on teaming was that teams must communicate in order to experience success. For example, Lambert and colleagues (1996) found that successful teams had open, honest communication within the team and throughout the organization. The researcher posed a question during the interviews, focus groups, and team self-evaluation meetings that asked the faculty to describe how the team communicated with the rest of the staff.

The non-team members who participated in the focus groups stated that their respective teams did not communicate well with the rest of the faculty and staff, with at least one participant from each school reporting, "very inconsistent communication." While the teams believed they communicate adequately with the staff "through conference meetings, handouts, presentations of special programs, and surveys," during an individual interview a DSLT member readily admitted,

> Our team has communicated with other staff members informally by word of mouth. Occasionally, issues have been shared in faculty meetings; however, no consistent communication has occurred. Few staff members really understand the purpose of DSLT.

In the evaluations from the all DSLT project dinner meetings, the three teams identified communication skills as being necessary and deserving more attention. Many members saw communication as a means to extend their impact beyond their individual classrooms to the entire school and faculty. Most of them also mentioned the need to improve or develop administrator-teacher dialogue.

Further, communication between team members was marked as a major accomplishment during the team self-evaluations. For instance, one member described the team's greatest strength as "our ability to talk openly with one another and have frank discussions about where we are and where we want to be." In contrast, the focus group participants felt quite the opposite, stating that many times that they "were not privy to information discussed at [the meetings]" and

> We never know what's going on, but they're getting recognition for being in the program and not giving us teachers feedback ... we're not privy to what's happening in those meetings .... They haven't done anything but look good, put it that way."

This conflict regarding communication put a strain on the teams' efforts to promote a positive environment and contributed to another related theme: trust building.

Trust. Good teams establish trust. Trust is an essential ingredient in a supportive environment. According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000), seven facets make up the construct of trust: willingness to risk vulnerability, confidence, benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. Similarly, Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) noted this when they stated that help, support, trust, and openness are at the heart of positive relationships. Trust in the expertise of faculty members, team members, administration, and the process of school reform is a necessity. Trust is positively related to several of the work process factors, including the amount of effort put into doing the work (Larson & LaFasto, 1989). Not surprisingly, data from all three schools indicated that trust helped and lack of trust hindered the teams' goals of promoting a positive school atmosphere and inclusion.

The baseline climate survey data from all three schools revealed deficiencies in the areas of teacher trust in principal and teacher trust in colleagues. Although the DSLT members concentrated on these issues, they were difficult to address. Two of the teams were directly associated with the administration. One member stated this as a main weakness of the leadership team. "Some teachers get the impression that we are the administration's swat team, trying to push their agenda." Another DSLT member added that their principal was not supportive. "The team expected the administrators to play a key role throughout the program but many times they were absent in body and in mind of what we were trying to accomplish."

While the team members focused mostly on the issue of trust as it related to administration, the non-faculty members pointed to the teams. "When you have something like this in the school building it should not be for [member] recognition, like 'I'm doing such and such a thing.'" On the other hand, another participant in the focus group stated that because of the work of their DSLT, "I think we are a more cohesive faculty. They're focusing on trust, but I'm not sure who's not trusting whom ... I think we have trust amongst each other."

Trust was also an issue within the teams themselves, as evident in the individual interviews held with the DSLT members at all three schools. One member accused another of "sharing our confidential talks," while another team's member stated that "some members do not have the goals of the team in their best interest [and] still participate in the gripe sessions about the very things we are trying to correct." The third team had a member who claimed that "not all members were present all the time and doing their fair share of the work."

Trust contributes to organizational and team effectiveness and is a requirement for both cooperation and effective collaboration in schools (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). In her conclusions of a study highlighting the importance of trust in school collaboration, Tschannen-Moran (2001) stated, "If we hope to facilitate collaboration in schools, we would do well to work toward a greater understanding of trust – how trust develops, what supports trust, and how to repair trust that has been damaged" (p. 328). This study's findings support her claim.

Collaboration

Collaboration was another emerging theme in this research study. When given administrative support for a collaborative environment, teachers must take the steps necessary for promoting teacher leadership by establishing collaborative relationships. Because social relationships between teachers often determine how teams are viewed, individual and group modeling of leadership can be a strong contribution to the school climate by promoting acceptance of the leadership role by others (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

For example, a focus group participant stated that the "feedback from others allowed me to see I wasn't the only one that feels a certain way." Based on his examination of teachers involved in curriculum reform, Fullan (1993a) stated, "Seeing colleagues learning was an added encouragement because individuals realized they were not alone in their need to learn" (p. 63). Collaboration enhances leadership capacity among teachers. Another non-DSLT member said the team "helped enhance us working together." Darling-Hammond (1997) emphasized that teachers needed to understand how to collaborate with other teachers to plan, assess, and improve learning within the school.

The effectiveness of collaboration surprised some of the team members as well. One found that "working together actually pays off," adding, "A very diversified group of professionals can work and play together for student success." All of the teams, to some extent, shared in the team self-evaluations that the collaboration was worthwhile. One DSLT member stated, "It was very positive to interact with other staff, to discuss and share ideas. This was significant to me and a real plus to the success." Another team's member reiterated this message, "I enjoyed working with people who shared common goals with me. They presented different strategies for reaching the same outcomes." A team member from the third DSLT recognized, "It is important to be an active team player and to take everyone's point of view into consideration."

All of the schools talked about improving and extending their teams to include other faculty members. Some were happier with the relationships within the team, but all spoke to the importance of multiple collaborating educators supporting and extending services for all for student. Having a purpose, having autonomy or self-management, and receiving support and encouragement are important characteristics that enhance collaboration (Campion et al., 1996).

According to Lieberman (1995), educators can enhance their output if they learn to work together in a professional relationship. That is, they can work together, identify common concerns, and work jointly on solving problems. Lieberman and Miller's (1991) review of teaching conditions and professional development also linked collaboration to enriched instruction, pupil-centered planning, and better learning outcomes.

Resources

The last major theme to emerge was the need for resources. DSLT members identified a variety of needs or resources required for them to be successful. In addition to strategies for working with colleagues and gaining their support, the most notable resources that emerged from this study's data were acquiring knowledge (e.g., professional development opportunities) and lack of time.

Knowledge. The action plans developed by the DSLTs indicated that there was a desire by all the teams to incorporate professional development opportunities for the entire faculty. For example, all of the schools included at least one workshop or presentation for all members on topics related directly to inclusion. A large amount of literature on inclusion states that both general and special educators tend to agree that inclusion does not work in all situations because many of them are not adequately prepared to educate students with disabilities in inclusive settings (Cole, 1999; LoVette, 1996; Sharpe et al., 1994; Tapasak & Walther-Thomas, 1999). Knowledge and training in the areas of collaboration, professional communication, student discipline or classroom management, and differentiated instruction were mentioned as helpful in the inclusive processes.

Members and non-members from all three schools were able to visit and observe other schools and classrooms that had been implementing inclusive practices effectively for several years. One focus group participant suggested, "I'd like to see role model classes like the school we went visiting last year. I'd like to see those classes actually set up here .... If we could see it in our school, I think that would be good." Glickman (1993)

supported this need for action research as an effective way to collectively learn new strategies.

Team members also cited the professional development opportunities afforded by the grant as needed knowledge. One school's DSLT member thought that "Getting and sharing new ideas at the [all-DSLT] meeting and implementing the new strategies was the greatest benefit to me." Another team member wrote, "The presence of a professional support person like [the grant coordinator] on a regular basis enhanced the growth of the teachers."

All three teams indicated they wanted or needed more knowledge and information, but the specific topics varied by school. Most individuals also suggested that additional people from their schools be involved in the training. They spoke highly of many of their experiences in the DSLT project and expressed an interest in continuing their personal and professional development. Time, however, was the greatest issue, as gaining knowledge and practicing techniques all takes time which, for most, was already in short supply.

Time. While lack of time should not be an excuse for doing nothing, it does provide a roadblock, especially in schools where additional meetings may be viewed as time teachers must take from their classroom responsibilities (Lieberman, 1995). A focus group participant acknowledged, "There's not enough money in the world they could give me to go to all those meetings .... They give up their planning time and go to dinners after school." A participant from another focus group echoed the same sentiment, "They have meetings a lot, first thing in the morning and after school." Another non-team

faculty member said that more teachers would volunteer to help with DSLT but "most of them have other responsibilities, there's so much stuff going on."

The team members also felt that lack of time was a major issue. "Finding time to get everything done and stay on pace with the ... curriculum" was a concern. Team members, focusing on their membership to DSLT, offered suggestions to combat this problem, "It would have been nice to see the members on the team have less responsibilities or duties around the school so that they could have committed fully to the action plan."

Time for planning and collaboration between general and special educators participating in inclusion was seen by both members and non-members as the greatest threat to their inclusive practices. As a focus group participant reported, "If the special ed. teachers are going to work with regular teachers, I think they should plan together. They have to meet after school, 'cause they don't have common planning time." This problem was also acknowledged at a DSLT self-evaluation meeting. "The teachers want to work together and they try, but there's so many kids [in the inclusion classes] that the workload doesn't allow us the time to do it efficiently."

Summary of Themes

The underlying purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate teams' impact on classroom practices, faculty member perceptions of the process and of the participation of students with disabilities in the general education setting within their respective schools over a two-year period. The premise was that through building a network of supports – both within and among the three schools – educational stakeholders, specifically teachers, would be able to analyze and define the needs of their

schools; develop action plans to address those needs and take responsibility for promoting the changes necessary in order to meet the diverse needs of all learners.

The themes that emerged provided insights into the processes and operations of the teams. Teacher empowerment, promoting a supportive environment, collaboration, and the need for resources are necessary ingredients for effective schools. Each DSLT, as a whole, viewed their contributions to the school as significant and positive. When sharing their successes and challenges during one of the all-DSLT project dinner meetings, the team members acknowledged that they felt as if they were making strides in improving their schools by effectively promote inclusive education and creating more positive climates in their respective schools.

The team members who were interviewed added some interesting viewpoints. They typically agreed with the team self-evaluations, but seemed more willing to admit to shortcomings in the team processes. For example, during the team self-evaluations, all three teams pointed out that their ability to communicate successfully with each other and with the rest of the staff was one of the most significant contributions. During the interviews, at least one member of each team agreed with their teams, yet admitted that much more could have been accomplished with increased communication. Additionally, the DSLTs marked collaboration as a positive, worthwhile experience that trickled down to the other members of the faculty; however, the individual team members who were interviewed indicated that they did not believe that the collaborative practices spread to the entire staff.

Excluding School A, the teachers representing the non-team members exhibited contradictory opinions. All the themes were represented in the focus group interviews,

but they primarily took an opposing twist. For instance, where the team self-evaluations and individual interviewees viewed teacher empowerment as an outcome of the DSLT project, the focus group participants implied that it was the team that was empowered, not the individual members or other non-team faculty members. Of the three focus groups, School A's participants more readily paralleled the standpoints of their leadership team.

The themes that emerged from the data were not a surprise to the researcher. However, the issues of trust under supportive environment and the desire for more knowledge were unexpected. The trust issues and need for knowledge were evident in one school, but the fact that it emerged across all three settings was a revelation to the researcher. The next chapter incorporates these themes with findings in order to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER VI – Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Chapter VI discusses the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this study. The first section presents the findings for the overarching research questions and the three subquestions. The second section provides conclusions with summaries for the purpose, research method, and analysis of the findings. Finally, recommendations for research and practice are presented along with the researcher's closing thoughts.

Findings

Within-case and cross-case analyses of data gathered via focus groups, team self-evaluations, climate surveys, archival data, and team member interviews were used to answer the research questions. The events listing and action plans also provided support for the findings of these questions. Below, the questions are addressed first by individual school, then with a summary of findings for all three sites.

Overarching Question

The overarching research question was: How did the collaborative practices and processes of school-based leadership teams promote inclusive efforts in schools? More specifically, what initiatives prompted by these teams impacted the perceptions of faculty members of their school and of educating students with disabilities? To answer this question, the researcher relied on all of the data collected during the study as well as the emerging themes from the cross-case analyses described above.

School A. The DSLT at School A used the funding and incentives from the grant

to organize several professional development workshops at the school to promote inclusion. For example, they held a workshop on *The ABCs of Inclusion and Collaboration* and made arrangements for a follow-up luncheon at a local restaurant for anyone who wanted further dialogue with the facilitator. Other professional development opportunities arranged by the team and funded by the grant focused on such topics as active learning, classroom behavior management, professional communication, and cooperative learning strategies.

Based on the data from the climate surveys, the team felt it necessary to place major emphasis on trust. As a result, they supported activities such as family night, a professional teacher book club, and dinner workshops, all focused on "creating an environment conducive to learning." The climate indicators for trust showed improvement, as did the indicators for collegial leadership and organizational leadership. Further, the non-team members who participated in the focus groups praised their leadership team for "boosting the morale of the staff by kinda being our voice for this whole inclusion process." The team was also credited for "guiding teachers in the right direction – meaning providing new up to date ideas on teaching." After admitting that inclusion "is more consistent across classrooms," this non-team member stated, "I still think we should think things through before we implement them. Not all kids belong in inclusion. The teachers work too hard to help these kids. The special ed. teachers miss their lunch."

The team members felt that their greatest accomplishment was establishing "a more professional and trusting relationship" with the staff. One member said that it

"made them more accepting to inclusion." During an interview, another team member stated:

> Our DSLT was responsible for incorporating inclusive education even with strong opposition from most of the staff. Two years ago, inclusion was called *intrusion* by many of our staff members. Ask one of them today, and their response would probably be that an included student is one that at least tries and responds to their teaching. We are proud of the strides we have made, but there is still much work to do.

School B. During the team self-evaluations, School B's DSLT stated that because they were "working together for the good of the school and the students," they were able to make a difference. In fact, they were "surprised that we were able to make it happen in a very short time." To the contrary, one member admitted in an interview, "I am not sure if the team is as big an influence as we would like to think, because there are so many things happening at the same time it's hard to judge which is causal."

This comment was evident to the researcher when during the focus group with non-team members all the participants nodded in agreement when one reported that they had "no training for inclusion .... I think we got some handouts. I'm sure we have because they're in the bottom of my filing drawer." The team arranged for the grant coordinator and another independent consultant to conduct a workshop on co-teaching and inclusion during the first year of the project. The non-team teachers did not recognize that this mandatory professional development presentation was funded and coordinated by their leadership team.

Additionally, the action plans and budget forms indicated that the team arranged for many individuals – both DSLT members and non-members – to participate in workshops, symposia, and conferences. In addition to paying the registration fee for these professional development activities, the team funded overnight stays at hotels and bought participants' meals. The topics of these conferences varied. Some were geared toward special education and state standardized testing, others focused on reading across the curriculum and the implications of the NCLB.

In addition, two small groups of faculty members (six members and four non-DSLT members) visited two local middle schools that had been implementing inclusion. They observed instruction and talked to the teachers involved in the inclusive classrooms about the pros and cons of inclusion. The visiting teachers also were able to discuss with the administrators on such topics as classroom discipline and scheduling.

The researcher developed two working theories while gathering and analyzing the data for School B: (a) none of the eight participants were among the individuals who went to the conferences or visited the schools; and (b) this school-based leadership team did not advertise that their activities were sponsored by their DSLT and the grant project.

School C. According to the DSLT action plan for School C, the team was sending teachers to conferences and workshops in order to prepare them for future inclusive efforts. Additionally, during the second year of the project, the team funded a stipend and dinner for teachers volunteering to attend an after school workshop. Almost every teacher (33 of 41) attended this workshop. Due to the low number of respondents to her invitations distributed to the non-DSLT members, the researcher attended this workshop in order to elicit volunteers for the focus group. After an introduction from the principal,

the researcher overheard one faculty member state, "I didn't know we had a leadership team."

During the focus group session, a non-team member openly stated, "I said I'd come because I wanted to find out what this 'DLTS' is. The first time I heard of it was when you talked at that dinner meeting last month." Another focus group participant added, "[Inclusion] was made without our knowledge. That was already done by the principal when we came back [from summer vacation]." The others in the group concurred, "We can't say that DSLT had anything to do with that." These teachers also stated that their inclusion process was "done in reverse." They reported that the dinner meeting held one month prior to the focus group session was on implementation of inclusion. "I remember sitting in the meeting thinking, 'why are they telling us how to implement it when we're already doing it?' We implemented [inclusion] in September and had the workshop in January."

During an individual interview conducted with a DSLT member, it was reported to the researcher:

> Our team has made an impact on instructional practices, like what's going on in the classroom because we have provided faculty and staff with some of the necessary tools needed to make inclusion a success for all teachers and students. We have attempted to bridge the gap between special educators and regular educators to help everyone understand that we all want what is best for all students ....

To the contrary, another interviewee and DSLT member acknowledged, "Our new efforts with inclusion may result in positive differences in instructional practices once teachers

have been provided with additional training and follow-up discussions." The non-team members echoed this, "They're good at going to workshops." Furthermore, the non-DSLT faculty members suggested that the team members who were gone all the time to conferences "come back and give us a workshop. Let us get the information at our own workshop." These teachers were unaware of the follow-up activities planned by the team, which included two independent special education consultants observing their inclusive classes over a period of eight days (two days per grade level). These observations included four days of follow-up brainstorming sessions with the grade level inclusion teachers on how to improve instruction while meeting the needs of all learners in the classroom.

Summary of the schools. In all three schools, the members of the leadership team truly believed that their works and efforts were making more of a difference in the inclusion process than the individual non-team member teachers did. Only fellow faculty members from one school recognized their DSLT as having an impact on the inclusive practices. The teams at the other two schools arranged for activities surrounding the topic of inclusion, but the teachers were unable to make the connection between DSLT and these opportunities. All three leadership teams exhibited positive intent in their efforts. They were focused on improving their school atmosphere in order to help with the inclusive education process. Lack of communication, which emerged as a theme in this study, may have directly contributed to the discrepancies noted above.

Subquestion #1

Research subquestion 1 was: To what extent did faculty members believe that their school-based leadership team facilitated change that promoted inclusion of students

with disabilities? The researcher relied on the focus group data, climate survey data, interviews, and team evaluations to answer this question.

School A. School A's DSLT arranged for four groups of teachers – 16 general and special educators – to visit a school more than an hour away that had been implementing inclusion for more than 10 years. One team member described this experience as proof that the situation "doesn't have to be perfect for inclusion to work." She added that "it opened the eyes of the unbelievers and quieted the doubts of the fence sitters." More significant, the focus group participants indicated that this was a valuable opportunity, but they wanted more. "I heard so much about this particular school that I want to see it with our kids, here in our school."

Additionally, team members noted that their team was able to "promote professionalism and camaraderie among colleagues." A member added that this gave "the teachers a chance to be a part of the leadership of the school." On the same note, non-team members stated, "They get our feedback. We can go to them and tell them what's going on. Can we change this? Or keep this?" Another non-team member acknowledged, "They're a cohesive group of individuals that tries to guide us in our mission for inclusion. They don't always have the answers, but they try."

School B. As mentioned, the non-team members at School B who participated in the focus groups did not know which faculty members were part of their DSLT. Additionally, they were not aware of any other purpose of the leadership team than to promote a positive environment by helping them "socialize and be together." The non-team members did not attribute any of the inclusive efforts to the team, but after they brainstormed the names of the team members one participant stated, "I remember at one

point, they showed us the results of a survey and we had to take the weak areas and come up with plans to address [them]." As if this response triggered their memory, the others agreed. Another participant reported that "they're not always visible." Yet another focus group volunteer asked, "Don't they come to our grade-level meetings and ask us questions and stuff." Others chimed in, "They're our sounding board."

Being a "sounding board" and asking for feedback from the other faculty members is one accomplishment that the team celebrated. "I feel that members of our school family trust that we have faith in their ability to develop solutions and work together. They know we value them as professionals." One of School B's DSLT members added, "We have increased the morale and improved climate. We have made them aware of using different strategies in order to reach each and every student."

School C. School C attributed the inclusion program at their school directly to the change in administration. Both team members and non-team members stated that it was implemented without their knowledge and was a surprise to them when they returned for school in the second year of the study. As one team member adamantly conveyed during an interview, "The school's inclusion efforts were implemented based upon a decision from central office. Ideas and concerns discussed among DSLT members have not been shared with faculty members."

The team self-evaluation and action plan revealed that the team was more concerned with improving their school climate and the relationships with the teachers than inclusion. The climate survey results indicated that over the two-year period of the study, the collective perceptions of School C's faculty of teacher trust in colleagues increased drastically. The teachers not on the DSLT stated in the focus group session that

the DSLT "provided us with a little bit of respite type activities for the teachers, like the sundae thing," referring to a mandatory faculty meeting, which was turned into an ice cream social for the staff. One team member divulged, "Sadly, we were focusing on staff morale more; however, we do share more of our ideas now, so I guess that did make a difference in our classrooms."

Summary of the schools. The data gathered at all three schools supported the assumption that the leadership teams, to some degree, facilitated a positive change within their schools. Even though the impetus of the change was not always known or present, the teams brought the dialogue surrounding inclusion and meeting the needs of students with disabilities and other low achieving students to the forefront of the conversations, thereby heightening faculty and staff members' awareness of the topic.

Only School A's teachers collectively believed that their team promoted inclusion of students with disabilities. In School B, the team members thought they were promoting inclusion; however, the perceptions of the non-team members were to the contrary. Both the DSLT members and non-members in School C agreed that their leadership team had nothing to do with promoting inclusive education. All three school-based leadership teams believed that they were able to adequately organize opportunities for staff members to receive training in order to assist with the meeting the needs of students with disabilities in the general education classrooms.

Research Subquestions #2 and #3

Research subquestions 2 and 3 were: How did the leadership team project impact classroom practices? And, to what extent did the school-based leadership teams increase opportunities for students with disabilities to be served and participate within the general

education setting? Data from the team self-evaluations, interviews, focus groups, archival records, and classroom observations assisted in answering these two related questions.

School A. School A presented more professional development opportunities for their teachers than the teams at the two other schools in the project. While some of the workshops were mandatory (e.g., inclusion, cooperative learning strategies), some were voluntary (e.g., behavior management). One focus group participant reported, "I guess the new ideas are taken to the classroom. We're trying them, some of them are successful, but some of them aren't. But we're trying." Site visits to School A by the researcher also revealed that teachers were trying to implement the strategies and techniques presented at the workshops. For instance, after the workshop on cooperative learning strategies, the researcher observed two teachers working together to prepare for a science lesson using one of the activities presented by the facilitator. Additionally, the team requested materials from the special education lending library at the College on the topic.

One participant stated, "More students are included." This is not only evident in the many comments of the faculty members, but also in the number of actual general education teachers at the school who are participating in the inclusive program. The year before DSLT was implemented, not one general education subject area teacher participated in inclusion. During the second year, School A had five general educators teaching in an inclusive environment, and the last year of the project the number increased to 13 teachers. One general educator and DSLT member reported, "My greatest accomplishment was working with special education students in my regular classroom."

School B. When posed a question regarding the impact of the leadership team on the inclusion of students with disabilities, one member who was interviewed stated:

> Prior to the formation of the DSLT team, there were less special ed. students involved in the general curriculum. The enrollment in the resources classes were higher than today. As a result of the team's school wide action plan, classes have increased numbers of special needs students across disciplinary areas.

The same question got quite a different response during the focus group held at School B, where one participant divulged, "I don't think they focused too much on instruction things as much as togetherness." Another non-team member added, "Honestly, we don't know what they're doing. I don't know who they are." After discussing inclusion more specifically, the focus group participants nodded in agreement to the comment, "We do have more inclusion classes. That might be able to be attributed to the team, but more students is more students and has nothing to do with the team."

According to the data collected from the office at School B, seven academic area general educators participated in inclusion during the 2000-2001 school year. During the following year – the first year of the DSLT project – that number increased to 12. In the final year of the grant project, 24 general education teachers were working with special educators in inclusive settings. While the team members felt they attributed to this increase, the non-team members did not share the same feelings:

> I don't know if the team had an impact on it any more so than the law. We've known that the law is pushing for special ed. kids to be included, which we were doing anyway. I think we're just pushing more. I don't think the team necessarily did that. It was already moving in that direction.

School C. Both focus group participants and interviewees at School C agreed that the DSLT did not impact instructional practices in their school. One non-team member stated, "They don't help me. I don't get to go to workshops." However, the team self-evaluations indicated that because of the positive relationships that were built and the increased camaraderie, the teachers had a greater "acceptance of diversity," which in turn encouraged "cooperative teaching, planning, and playing."

All the participants – team members and non-team members alike – unequivocally confirmed that DSLT had absolutely no bearing on the increased opportunities for students with disabilities participating in the general education curriculum. Although some teachers attributed the drastic increased numbers of students with disabilities included in the general education classes to the administrator, this was a mandate handed down to the school via their central office. Over the course of the DSLT grant project, the number of general education teachers working in inclusive settings increased to eight teachers (one two-teacher team for each grade level). Considering that during the previous two years inclusion consisted of special education teachers finding teachers to "let" their students join the core classes for special occasions, this was a drastic change.

Summary of the schools. Non-team members at two of the three schools, School A, again being the exception, indicated that the DSLT project had no impact on their classroom practices. At all three schools, DSLT members acknowledged that being part of the leadership team impacted their own instructional practices. The professional development, training, and assistance from the College representatives "helped us grow personally and in our professional lives."

Although the number of inclusion classes at each school increased, none of the schools could directly attribute the increased number of students being included to the DSLT project. At each school had DSLT members and non-team members mentioned NCLB, state initiatives, and central office directives as possible causes for the inclusive programs. The teachers readily acknowledged, "We knew it was coming. It was just a matter of time."

Although challenges were clearly evident at all three sites, benefits were also noted. Team members in all three schools indicated increased communication among and between faculty and administration as the primary benefit of the project. One special education teacher noted that prior to being on the DSLT, she never had the opportunity to discuss student-related issues with other faculty members because of scheduling conflicts. She further stated, "I didn't know that other teachers were having the same problems with regular kids in their classes." One non-team member summed the benefits up nicely during a focus group interview. Even though the group as a whole did not understand the purpose of the DSLT project, she stated, "I'm hard pressed to come up with a weakness. Anything that's out there to help our school, help our students, is well worth it. No matter what it is, if the kids are going to benefit it, it's a good thing." The next section presents conclusions based upon the findings from the data gathered and information from the literature review.

Conclusions

Leadership teams consisting of teachers are not a common practice in schools. Teachers have typically been expected to operate in isolation while coping in extremely complex roles with various responsibilities. In addition to working with students

exhibiting multiple backgrounds, abilities, and interests, teachers are required to deal with grade level, subject area, and departmental matters. Furthermore, their actions are not only guided by administrators, district directives, and state and federal mandates, but also by parents and communities. Unfortunately, teachers are often required to accomplish these duties outside the realm of collaboration.

Based on the emerging themes and findings of this study, this researcher has concluded that the leadership teams from three southeastern Virginia schools benefited from their participation in and the processes of the DSLT project. That is, the members grew both personally and professionally over the two years of the grant project. They focused on their DSLT action plans with goals aimed at improving the faculty perceptions of climate in order to create an environment conducive to the inclusion of students with disabilities within the general education setting. As they focused on their goals, the teams faced several of challenges. They were able to address these issues via collaboration, teaming, and networking.

Unfortunately, one of the greatest barriers to teacher leadership was the teachers themselves. The DSLT members wanted to be leaders; however, they were did not possess the tools or know-how to get the rest of the faculty to buy in to their efforts. Engaging small groups of teachers and administrators in the process of school improvement was not difficult. The challenge was involving all constituents! School A's DSLTs was recognized as a force behind the inclusion process, while the other DSLT were virtually invisible –the faculty members were either unaware of their purpose (School B) or their presence (School C). The faculty at all three schools reaped the

benefits of schoolwide professional development on inclusive education even if they were not aware of the source of the training.

Summary of Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to observe, describe, and analyze the development of school-based leadership teams and their impact on classroom practices and teaching techniques; faculty member perceptions of school climate; and the participation of students with disabilities in the general education setting within their respective schools over a two-year period. Furthermore, an attempt was made to identify what made school teams successful and what impact their work had on special education service delivery, specifically inclusive practices.

Through a case-study approach, this researcher examined three school-based leadership teams as they focused on improving inclusive opportunities for students with mild to moderate disabilities. It was the major assumption of this study that by building a network of supports – both within and among the three schools – educational stakeholders, specifically teachers, would be able to (a) analyze and define the needs of their schools; (b) develop action plans addressing those needs; and (c) take responsibility for promoting necessary changes in order to meet the diverse needs of all learners.

Summary of Research Method

This study used a multiple-case-study design to obtain teachers' perceptions of their school climate and school-based leadership teams while identifying the impact of those teams on creating more inclusive environments for students with disabilities. This method allowed the researcher to collect data in real-life contexts. The qualitative inquiry

selected for this study allowed the researcher to gather data that provided a descriptive narrative of the context and participants' interactions within that context.

Based on a review of the literature, the researcher developed topics to identify interview and focus group questions, as well as to guide the direction of the observations. Data were collected using various qualitative methodologies: (a) focus groups, (b) interviews, (c) observations, and (d) document reviews. Additionally, data gathered from the grant were incorporated (e.g., team self-evaluations, climate survey results). A purposive selection process was used to identify interview and focus group participants.

Summary of Analysis of the Findings

Qualitative data were systematically analyzed during the study. Data gathered from interviews, observations, focus groups, and team self-evaluations at each of the three sites were transcribed manually by the researcher using a word processor and analyzed using an interactive processes recommended by Erlandson and colleagues (1993). This process involved analyses at the research sites during the collection of data and ongoing analyses of data (e.g., before, during, and after actual collection of data). The researcher analyzed the texts (e.g., archival documents, climate survey results, events listing) by physically coding and chunking data, identifying themes, and memoing (Stake, 2000).

The credibility of the study was established by using data analysis methods that detailed the accuracy of the findings and the context in which the inquiry was conducted (Erlandson et al., 1993). Further, triangulation of data and member checks were used to establish credibility, verify accuracy, and increase the internal validity of the study (Creswell, 1998; Janesick, 2000; Merriam, 1998).

During the analysis of the data, common categories and patterns, then themes, emerged. Triangulation of data from all three DSLT schools and from multiple data collection techniques confirmed these emergent themes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). These patterns and themes were synthesized and used to discuss the findings. Additionally, relevant information from the literature review was discussed in relation to the specific themes. The following section identifies the implications and recommendations.

Implications from the Study

Overall, this study determined that small groups of individuals working together within a school have the capacity to make a difference; however, support from all stakeholders is needed in order to bring about major changes in school operations. The focus of the DSLT project was specifically to improve educational opportunities for students with disabilities and low-achieving students. To that end, the teams incorporated goals and activities focused on creating positive work environments.

Through this qualitative multiple-case-study approach, it was determined that many factors contributed to the DSLT success. As such, this study provides a basis for future research and recommendations for practice in several areas.

Recommendations for Research

This study provided insights into the impact of school-based leadership teams on inclusive practices in schools; however, further research is needed. The following are recommendations for future researchers.

- In addition to the *quantity*, assess the *quality* of the inclusive education classes,
- Replicate the study in schools with similar demographics and populations, and
- Follow the leadership teams' progress beyond the conclusion of the grant project.

This study focused on participation of students with disabilities in the general education setting. The next obvious step would be to conduct a study assessing student achievement. A longitudinal study following groups of students with and without disabilities as they progress through several years of inclusive education would provide researchers and practitioners with the needed information for identifying and supporting future best practices.

This study was conducted in schools of various sizes. Based on the results of the data analyses, the team at the smallest school in the project had the greatest impact on the perceptions of non-team members regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities. Another study conducted in schools with similar populations and demographics may determine if it was the size of the faculty that contributed to this team's success. Additionally, the study could be extended to other school levels, such as elementary schools or high schools.

The benefits of being associated with an institution of higher educations and the resources and personnel afforded by the College may have influenced the outcome of the study. Following these leadership teams beyond the conclusion of the DSLT project could provide interesting insights for the institutionalization of the teaming process and inclusion. Further research on the impact of leadership teams on other school reform efforts would also be beneficial.

Recommendations for Practice

Several questions surfaced as a result of the DSLT project and this study, including the following. From where will the time (and resources) come for teachers to collaborate and engage in the teaming process? Who is ultimately responsible for

providing the team with the necessary tools and training (e.g., teaming, decision-making and problem-solving skills) to assist teacher leaders in addressing important issues in schools (e.g., inclusion, student achievement)? How do we involve all stakeholders in school improvement? The answers to these questions are not only the prerequisites for successful inclusion and other reform efforts, but also provide a key to the door to effective teacher leadership.

Simply providing opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in the general education classrooms may be a start, but it is not nearly enough. The following recommendations for practice are offered based on the results of the study.

- Assess the climate, culture, and operations of the school and share the results,
- Provide networks of support between schools,
- Build teams of volunteer leaders across grade levels and disciplines, and
- Incorporate time for professional development, as well as for planning, reflection, and celebration.

The climate survey results gave the faculty and staff an indication of their fellow colleagues' perceptions of the school environment. This provided a baseline of the school context. Offering such assessment results of the current state of the school environment will allow school teams and school leaders to determine their own areas of strength and weakness and provided a needed foundation for any improvement plan.

The opportunities that team members had to develop networks of support between the three schools were recognized by the participants as being significant. One team member noted on an evaluation from the second summer workshop, "We made friends with other teachers who had the same problems as us. We could talk to them on a

professional level and they gave us ideas to use in our classrooms." At each of the all-DSLT project meetings, the teams shared their successes and conversed about topics and situations that were present at all three sites. The team members shared strategies that contributed to their success and brainstormed possible resolutions to existing problems.

The members of these three leadership teams consistently reported an increase of camaraderie and support from fellow members. Engaging small groups of teacher volunteers in teams may prove to be beneficial in solving many problems that surface within the school. It is recommended that all teachers have the opportunity to participate as a team member at some point during the school year or in alternating years. This would allow for the tasks to be distributed throughout the faculty instead of constantly being placed on the same individuals.

Professional development opportunities for all teachers emphasizing collaboration, cooperation, and effective communication, as well as teaching and student learning are necessary. Teachers not only need to know how to collaborate, they also need the resources – specifically time and knowledge – in order to improve student outcomes in schools. Further, if these professional development activities are to be successful, input from the all stakeholders is essential. Faculty members should be encouraged to share what they already know and what they would like to know surrounding a topic. This would provide the faculty and staff with focused training in the areas in which they need it most.

Additionally, time for planning, reflection, and celebration is also important. School districts and building administrators can send a message of support by allocating time and resources to aid in developing shared leadership and shared decision-making. If

teachers are to take responsibility for improving student achievement, this is the most important message that could be sent.

Closing Comments

To outsiders, the impact of these leadership teams may seem less than fully successful. However, the actual gains made in a relatively short period of time, in light of where the individual schools started, were significant. The bar was raised and they were able to reach it! These leadership teams and the professional (and personal) connections made with the other schools and the DSLT College staff were invaluable. The amount of problem-solving, conversations, and dialogue surrounding the topics of meeting the needs of all students, as well as the networking opportunities, was the most beneficial result of this project. The DSLT members were dedicated to improving their school and helping all their students achieve and succeed. Consequently, *inclusion* no longer being referred to as *intrusion* is a prime example of the changes in thinking and attitudes that occurred. The culture and norms of all three schools changed.

Furthermore, teachers must interact with various constituents: students, parents, communities, administrators, and other teachers as well. Such interactions require communication, cooperation, and collaboration. Collaboration involves more than meeting and talking. It is the primary component of inclusion, and therefore, the responsibility of preservice and inservice teacher training programs – both general and special education – to incorporate these collaborative opportunities into their curricula. Additionally, administrators, specifically building leaders, must obtain training to facilitate and support collaborative leadership in school environments. To ensure that

teams will be effective, they must receive appropriate training, time, and support as well as the authority to make decisions.

Educational reform efforts, specifically inclusive education, designed to address issues such as these will not be successful unless embraced by stakeholders as important issues in schools. If teams of teachers working together for the achievement of all students is the desired end result, effective collaboration involving all stakeholders is the necessary and critical course of action. In order to address complex problems and answer difficult questions surrounding education of all students with their increasingly diverse backgrounds and abilities, teachers and other members of the school community must work together interdependently.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

School Profiles

District and School Information

	School A	School B	School C
Size of District (# of students)	**2,772**	**11,983**	**1,423**
Number of Schools	5	19	3
Grade levels of School	**5th-6th**	**6th-8th**	**4th-7th**
Total Faculty	36	57	41
Total Students	429	748	461
Free & Reduced Lunch	58.6%	54.3%	68.1%

Special Education Population

Number of Students with:	School A	School B	School C
Learning Disabilities	23	36	58
Emotional Disorders	7	11	1
Mental Retardation	29	15	14
Other Health Impaired	5	20	9
Speech Language Impairments	3	2	27
Autism	0	0	1
Hearing Impairments	0	3	0
Total	68	87	110

School Profiles

General Educators Participating in Inclusion

Number of Inclusive Education Classrooms	School A	School B	School C
2000-2001	0	7	0
2001-2002	5	12	0
2002-2003	13	24	8

Team Membership 2001-2002

	School A	School B	School C
Total DSLT Members	**10**	**11**	**10**
Special Educators	4	2	0
General Educators	4	6	9
Assistant Principals	1	2	0
Principals	1	1	1

Team Membership 2002-2003

	School A	School B	School C
Total DSLT Members	**11**	**10**	**12**
Special Educators	2	2	2
General Educators	7	6	9
Assistant Principals	1	1	0
Principals	1	1	1

Participant Demographics

	School A		School B		School C	
	FG	DSLT	FG	DSLT	FG	DSLT
Age Range:						
21-26 years	0%	27.3%	0%	0%	0%	0%
27-34 years	33.3%	27.3%	25%	0%	40%	33.3%
35-42 years	50%	27.3%	12.5%	10%	20%	41.7%
43-52 years	16.7%	0%	12.5%	50%	0%	25%
>52 years	0%	18.2%	50%	40%	40%	0%
Ethnicity:						
Asian	0%	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Black	66.7%	54.5%	75%	80%	80%	66.7%
Hispanic	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
White	33.3%	45.5%	25%	20%	20%	33.3%
Other	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Average Years Teaching	10	12.66	16	18.5	15.75	13.3
Average Years at Present School	6.4	6.64	9	8.6	5	7.6
Total Participants	6	11	8	10	5	12

FG = Focus Group Participants

Appendix B

Application for Team Membership

DEVELOPING A SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TEAM PROJECT
APPLICATION FOR TEAM MEMBERSHIP

Name _____

School Assignment (grade/subject) _____

Teaching Experience (years) _____ Highest Earned Degree _____

Summer Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

School Phone _____ Home Phone_____

I am interested in becoming a team member because

My experience in working with students with disabilities or low ability students is

I presently serve on the following school committee(s)

Initial training/planning sessions will be held August 23 (Thursday, 9AM - 4PM) and August 24 (Friday, 9AM - 1PM). I am available to participate on these dates!

Return to you building principal by June 22, 2001.

Appendix C

Focus Group and Interview Questions

Brief Introduction

Welcome. My name is Lisa Vernon and assisting me is [assistant moderator and doctoral student]. I am a doctoral candidate from the College of William & Mary and the coordinator of the Developing School Leadership Teams (DSLT) project. I am talking with you today to collect information for a research project I am conducting on the effectiveness of school-based leadership teams in promoting inclusive practices in schools.

Feel free to say what you think, even if it differs from what was already said. We'll be recording the discussion just so we don't miss any of your comments. No names will be attached to any reports. We will be on first name basis this afternoon and I'd like to begin by asking you to tell us your name and briefly describe the best learning experience you've had in the past year. Don't limit yourself to formal learning environments.

Guiding Questions

1. In your opinion, what are or should be the roles, responsibilities, and operations of a leadership team, specifically your DSLT?

   PROBES: How often do they meet? How does the team make decisions? What role does the team play in school improvement? What are they trying to accomplish? How do you know what they do?

2. How does the team communicate with other staff members?

   PROBES: How do you know the team is productive or accomplishing their goals? How does the team receive feedback from you – the teacher – parents or other stakeholders?

3. Think back to the past two to three years prior to the implementation of DSLT. To what extent has your Team made a difference in the instructional practices – that what is happening in the classrooms?

   PROBES: What strategies have been implemented or initiated? How do you know the team has been successful? How does the team know they have been successful?

4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of having a school leadership team, specifically your DSLT?

   PROBES: When you speak to colleagues – both within and outside the school – what do you say about DSLT? What do you like most about having a leadership team? What do you like least about having a leadership team? What about the DSL Team has been most beneficial to you? What was least helpful to you?

5. Tell me about the impact of your leadership team on the inclusion of students with disabilities.

   PROBES: How has the composition of your classes changed? How are the needs of all your students being met? What training has been offered to assist teachers with instruction of students with disabilities? In what trainings have you participated?

Appendix D

Member Check Verification Letter

Dear [DSLT Chairperson and Assistant Moderator],

My research project on the impact of school-based leadership teams on inclusive education is nearing completion. I need to ask for your help one more time. This is a voluntary member check of the findings and conclusions that I have derived from the data collected in your school and the other two DSLT schools.

The member check is an important factor in qualitative research. It is a process in which individuals who participated throughout the research study are asked to review and examine the information reported in order to provide input or feedback. Your review will help confirm that what is presented in the research report is accurate and true.

With this letter, I have attached my drafts of chapters IV and V of the study. These chapters present findings and conclusions drawn from the focus groups, interviews, archival data, team evaluations, and observations conducted over the past two years at all three DSLT sites. If you choose to participate, you may respond via the fax, e-mail, or address below.

Please be reminded that as with the rest of the information gathered for this project, this portion of the research study will remain confidential. The information will be shared, however, with the members of my dissertation committee for purposes of data analysis.

It has been a pleasure working with you, the DSLT, and the faculty members at your school. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you again for your cooperation and assistance throughout this process.

Sincerely,

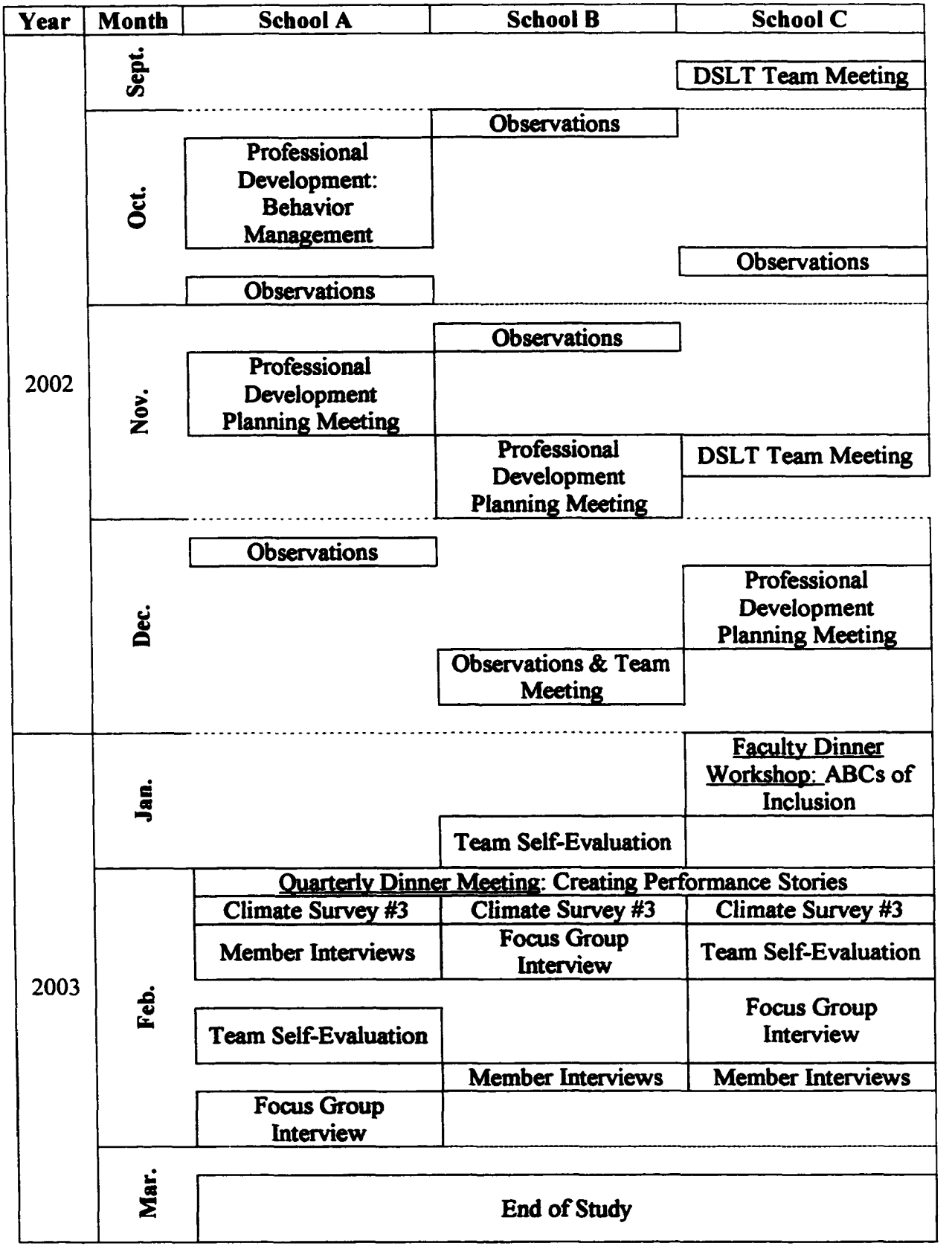
Lisa Jo Vernon
lvernon@cox.net
23 Academy Lane
Hampton, VA 23669
757-722-8391 (voice & fax)

Appendix E

Events Listing

Year	Month	School A	School B	School C
2001	May	Introduction & Climate Survey		
	June		Introduction & Climate Survey	Introduction & Climate Survey
	Aug.	Summer Workshop: Teambuilding, Characteristics of Students w/Disabilities, Creating Data-Supported Action Plans		
	Sept.			Observations & Team Meeting
	Oct.	Observations & Team Meeting	Observations & Team Meeting	Observations & Team Meeting
	Nov.	Quarterly Dinner Meeting: Principal Principles, Active Learning Activities and Teaching Strategies		
		Observations & Team Meeting	Observations & Team Meeting	Observations & Team Meeting
	Dec.	Observations & Team Meeting	Observations & Team Meeting	
			Faculty Workshop: "Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learner through Co-Teaching"	Observations & Team Meeting
2002	Jan.		Observations & Team Meeting	
				Observations & Team Meeting

Year	Month	School A	School B	School C
2002	Feb.	Observations & Team Meeting		
		Faculty Professional Development: Cooperative Learning: The Beginning Steps	Observations & Team Meeting	
				Observations & Team Meeting
	Mar.		Climate Survey #2	
		Arranged Site Visits to Veteran Inclusion School		Climate Survey #2
		Climate Survey #2		
		Quarterly Dinner Meeting: "Participatory Decision-Making"; School Sharing of Active Learning Strategies		
	Apr.	Observations & Team Meeting		
			Observations & Team Meeting	
		Team Observes Inclusion School		
				Observations & Team Meeting
	May	Observations & Team Meeting		
		Principals' Evaluation Meeting with External Evaluator of Grant		
			Observations & Team Meeting	
				Observations & Team Meeting
	June			End-of-Year Team Evaluation
		End-of-Year Team Evaluation	End-of-Year Team Evaluation	
		Special Education Conference on Inclusion		
		National Leadership Conference		
	Aug.	Summer Workshop: True Colors of Leaders; The Next Steps: Building Indicators of Success		



Appendix F

Letters for Support

Letter for Permission to Conduct Research

Research Department
School Division
Address

To Whom It May Concern:

I am the Grant Coordinator for the Developing School Leadership Teams (DSLT) project at [School]. Additionally, I am a doctoral candidate at the College of William and Mary and working on my dissertation proposal. I would like to base my research on the DSLT project.

The study will focus on the overall effectiveness of school-based leadership teams. In addition to assessing the impact that these teams have had on creating more inclusive environments and better educational opportunities for students with disabilities in their schools, the study will evaluate the faculty members' perceptions of the leadership team at [School]. The findings and conclusions from this study will identify the needs for future research on how to identify and assess successful teams, inclusive reform efforts, and shared leadership. One method of data collection that will be used is focus group interviews with faculty members who are not members of this leadership team.

This letter is eliciting your support for my study. The division, school, DSLT members, and focus group participants will be kept confidential. Additionally, the participation in this research study will be voluntary and participants will be advised that they may withdraw at any time. This information will add another layer of evaluation to the DSLT grant project by providing alternative viewpoints in assessing the effectiveness of the project.

Sincerely,

Lisa Jo Vernon
Grant Coordinator
Doctoral Candidate

Letter to Grant Co-Directors

November 19, 2002
23 Academy Lane
Hampton, VA 23669
(757) 722-8391

[Co-Directors]
Department of Education
College of William & Mary
P.O. Box 8795
Williamsburg, Virginia 23187-8795

Dear [Co-Directors];

As you know, I am a doctoral candidate at the College of William and Mary working on my dissertation, as well as the Grant Coordinator for the Developing School Leadership Teams (DSLT) incentive grant. I would like to base my dissertation research on the DSLT project.

The study will focus on the overall effectiveness of school-based leadership teams. In addition to assessing the impact these teams have had on creating more inclusive environments and better educational opportunities for students with disabilities in their schools, the study will evaluate the faculty members' perceptions of the leadership team at each DSLT school. The findings and conclusions from this study will identify the needs for future research in the identification and assessment of successful teams, inclusive reform efforts, and shared leadership. One method of data collection will consist of focus group interviews with faculty members who are not on the DSLT.

This letter is eliciting your support for the study. With this support, I fully intend to share my findings and analyses with the Virginia Department of Education, Office of Special Education Services. Additionally, I intend to publish these results. This information will add another layer of evaluation to the DSLT grant project by providing alternative viewpoints in assessing the overall effectiveness of the project.

Sincerely,

Lisa Jo Vernon
Doctoral Candidate
DSLT Grant Coordinator

Letter to Grant Funding Source

November 19, 2002
23 Academy Lane
Hampton, VA 23669
(757) 722-8391

[Grant Representative]
Virginia Department of Education
Office of Assessment and Reporting
James Monroe Building, 20th Floor
101 North 14th Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear [Grant Representative]:

I am a doctoral candidate at the College of William and Mary working on my dissertation, as well as the Grant Coordinator for the Developing School Leadership Teams (DSLT) incentive grant. I would like to base my dissertation research on the DSLT project.

The study will focus on the overall effectiveness of school-based leadership teams. In addition to assessing the impact these teams have had on creating more inclusive environments and better educational opportunities for students with disabilities in their schools, the study will evaluate the faculty members' perceptions of the leadership team at each DSLT school. The findings and conclusions from this study will identify the needs for future research in the identification and assessment of successful teams, inclusive reform efforts, and shared leadership. One method of data collection will consist of focus group interviews with faculty members who are not on the DSLT.

This letter is eliciting your support for the study. With this support, I fully intend to share my findings and analyses with the Virginia Department of Education, Office of Special Education Services. Additionally, I intend to publish these results. This information will add another layer of evaluation to the DSLT grant project by providing alternative viewpoints in assessing the overall effectiveness of the project.

Sincerely,

Lisa Jo Vernon
Doctoral Candidate
DSLT Grant Coordinator

Appendix G

Letter to Focus Group Participants

Dear Perspective Focus Group Participant;

My name is Lisa Vernon and I am a doctoral candidate at the College of William and Mary and the grant coordinator for the Developing School Leadership Teams (DSLT) project. During this school year, I will be conducting a research study to investigate the overall effectiveness of school-based leadership teams (i.e., DSLT). In addition to assessing the impact these teams have on creating more inclusive environments and better educational opportunities for students with disabilities, the study will evaluate faculty members' perceptions of the leadership team at [School]. The study findings about school leadership teams will be compared with the other schools involved in the DSLT project.

I am writing to ask for your participation in this study. A focus group will be conducted in your school. If you agree to participate in the focus group interview, please return this consent form. I will contact you to confirm the date and time it will be conducted. The focus group will last approximately 50 minutes and will be electronically and manually scripted. There will be refreshments and several door prizes.

In reporting the results of the research, schools and study participants will not be identified in any way. Individual responses will remain confidential. Participation in this process is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with your school, school division, or the College of William and Mary. If you do participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you have questions regarding subjects' rights, please contact Dr. Stan Hoegerman (757-221-2240), Chair of the Protection of Human Subjects Committee.

Please sign and return one copy of this consent form in the enclosed, pre-paid addressed envelope. Keep a copy of this letter for your records. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have voluntarily decided to participate in this research project. Thank you again for you assistance.

Sincerely,

Lisa Jo Vernon

Print Name _____ Date _____

School _____ Room _____

Signature _____

*THIS PROJECT WAS APPROVED BY THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone: 757-221-3901) ON December 6, 2002 AND EXPIRES ON December 6, 2003.

Appendix H

Permission to Tape Record and Use Information

Participant Demographics

Please provide the following information (*optional*).

Age of Participant: ( ) 21-26 ( ) 27-34 ( ) 35-42 ( ) 43-52 ( ) > 52

Ethnicity: ( ) Asian ( ) Black ( ) Hispanic ( ) White ( ) Other

Years Teaching: _____ Years at present school: _____

Grade Level(s): _____ Teaching Area(s): _____

Approximate percentage of students with disabilities taught:

( ) 0% ( ) 1-25% ( ) 26-50% ( ) 51-75% ( ) More than 75%

Permission to Tape Record & Use Information

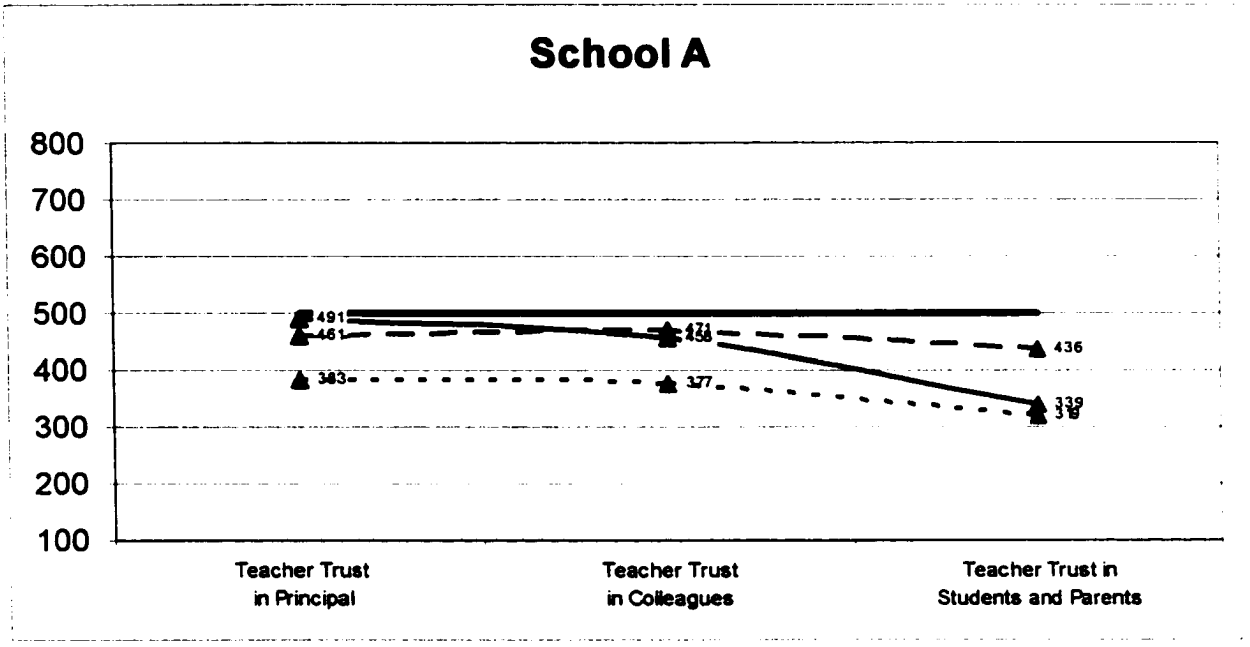
I, _____, agree to participate in this focus group interview. I grant permission for the discussion to be tape recorded. I understand that the information obtained during this session will be strictly confidential and I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

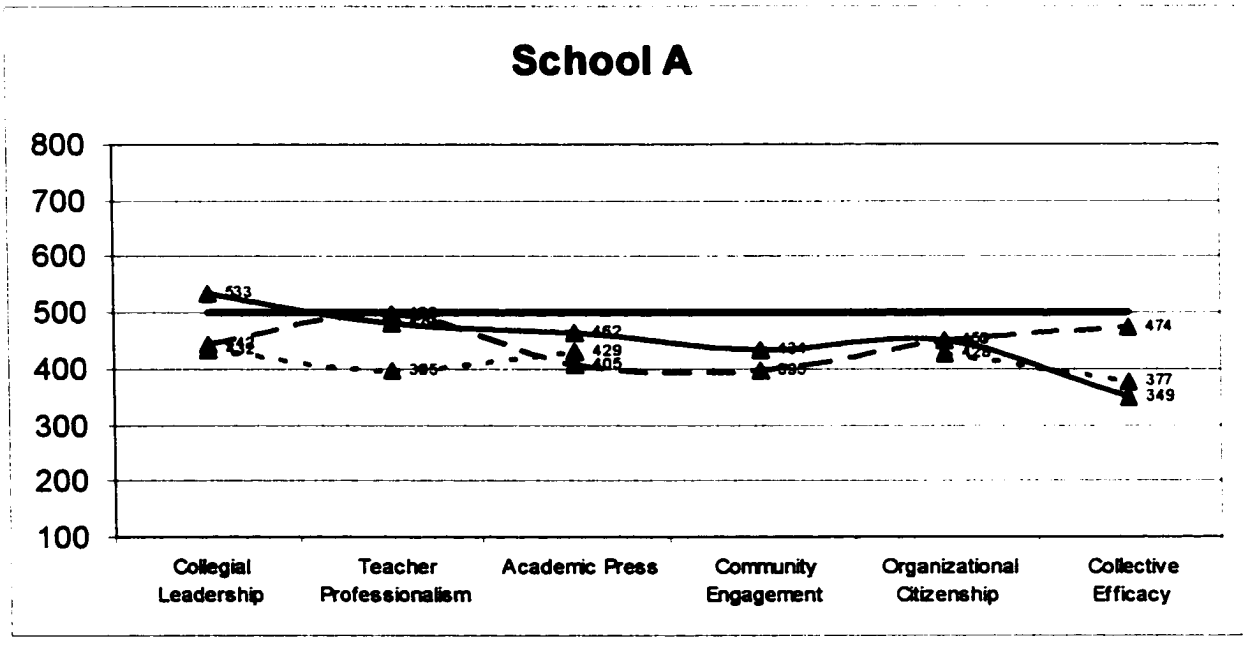
_____ _____

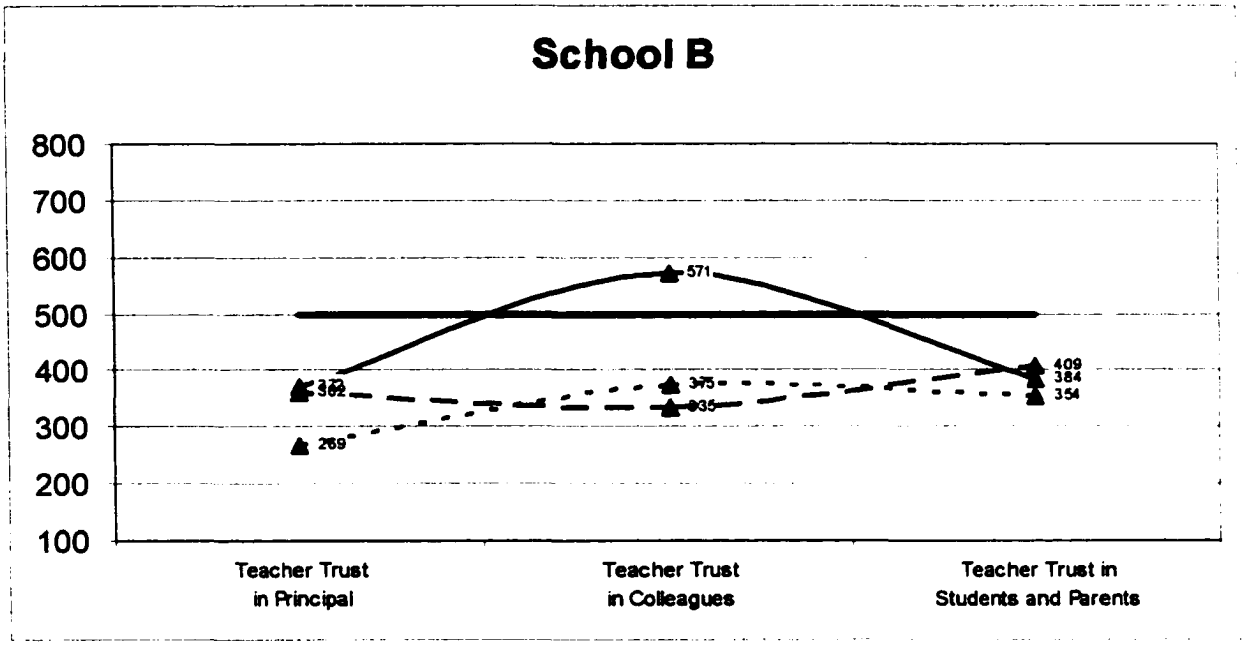
Signature date

Appendix I

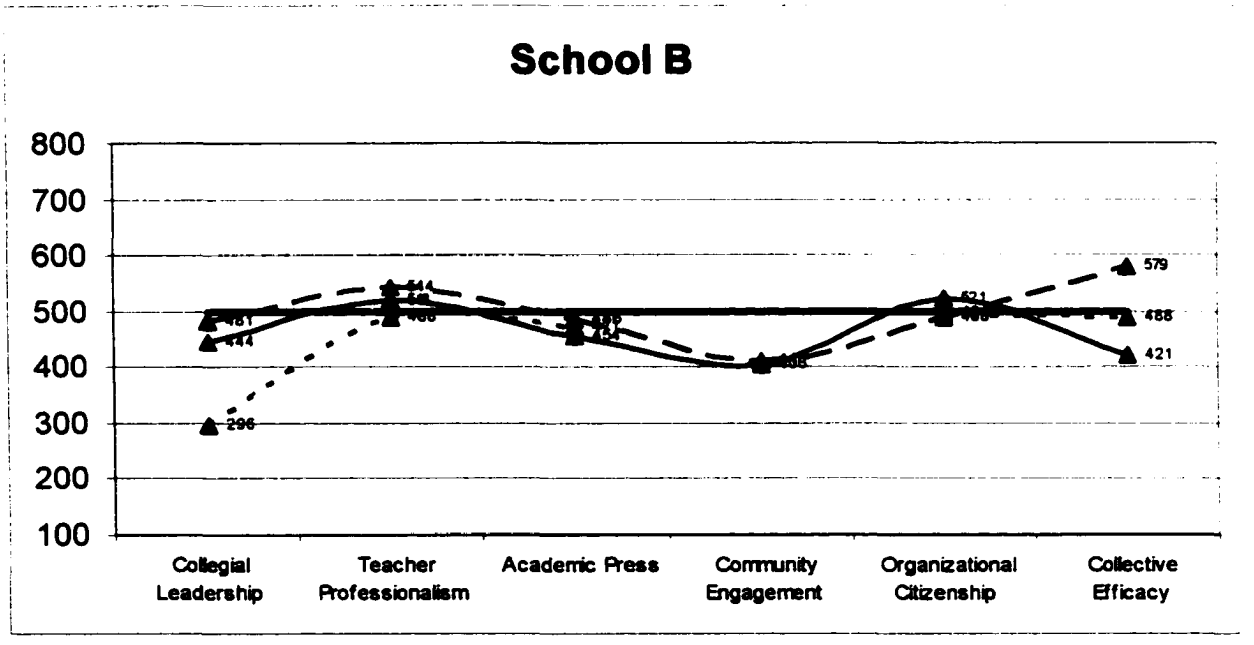
Charts of Climate Survey Results



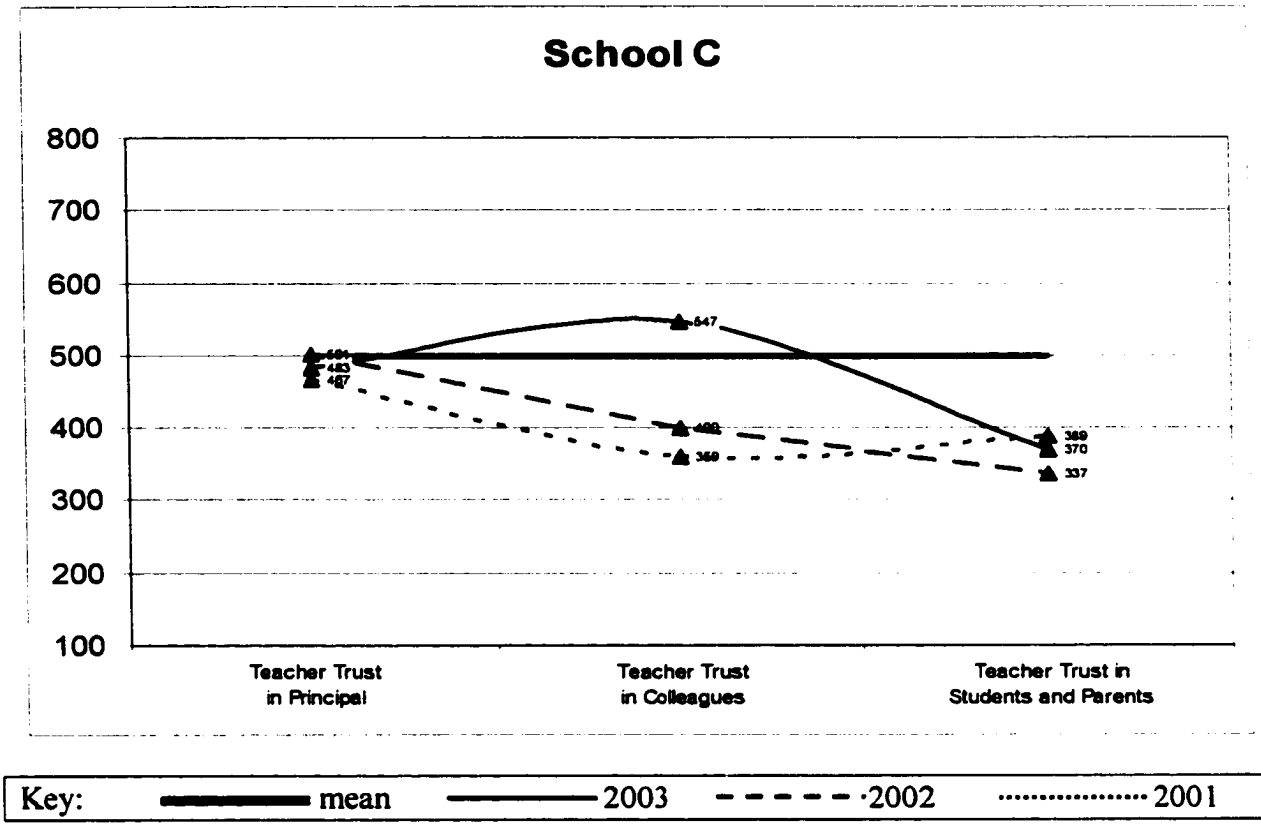


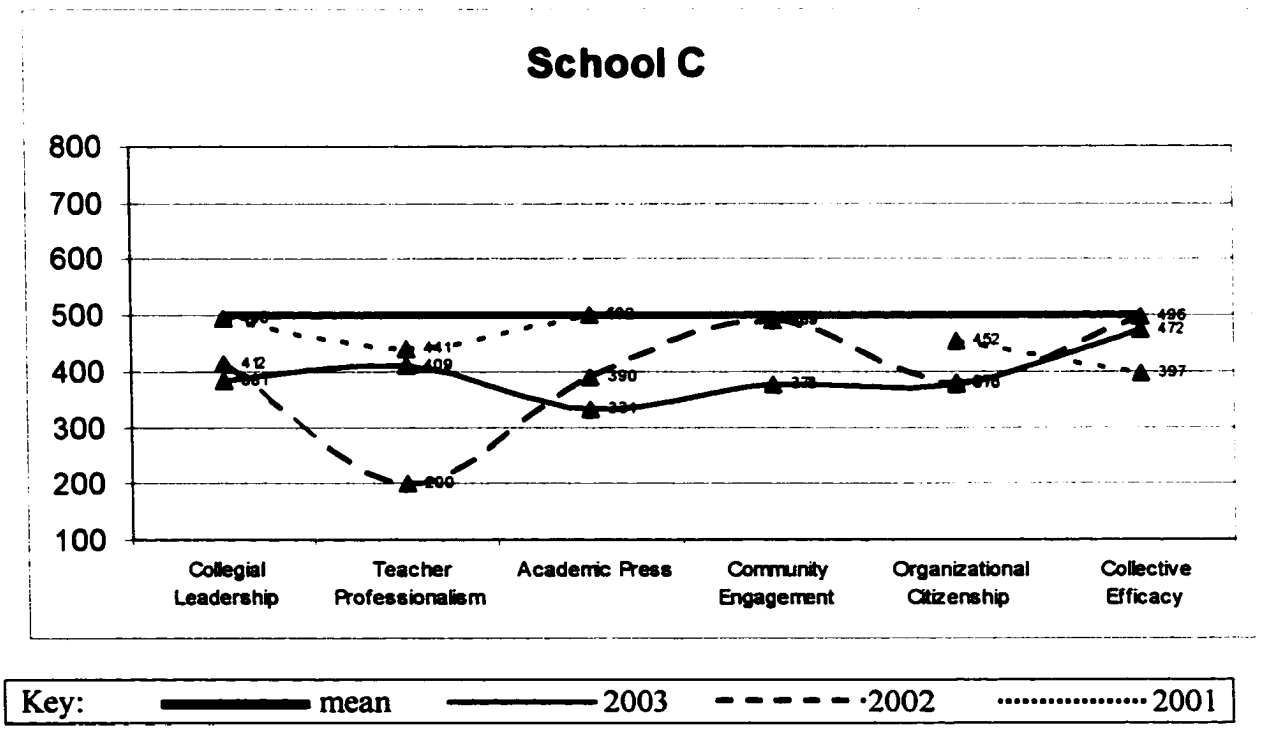


Key: mean 2003 2002 2001



Key: mean 2003 2002 2001





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